

Patients' Participation in Festivals

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IRRESPECTIVE of culture or country, festivals are happy events for people. Many children and grown-ups eagerly wait for the festivals. The dictionary meaning of the word, "festival", is a "joyful celebration", a season of performances of music, play or the like.

In our country, we celebrate a wide variety of occasions—some social, and some religious. Birthdays, marriage anniversaries, instances of promotion and other such occasions play an important role in our life. During such time, we share our happiness and joy with our family members, friends neighbours, and colleagues. They become memorable events in our life. Similarly, some occasions are of national importance. For instance, Independence Day, Republic Day, Children's day and birthdays of great leaders are celebrated all over the country. Many a time these days are declared holidays. Likewise, some days become significant by virtue of religious sanctity and sacred reasons—Deepavali, Sankranti, Ganesh Chaturthi, Christmas, Sri Rama Navami and Ramzan. These days are very important for the people belonging to the respective religions.

Depending on our Socio-economic conditions, these important occasions are celebrated. The above said occasions become significant events in our life. If such festivals have the great potentials of giving happiness and satisfaction to normal persons, why they should not be utilized for therapeutic purposes for mentally ill? It is the experience of mental health professionals, specially psychiatric nurses that involvement of mentally disturbed persons in celebrations of these occasions pay rich dividends, not only in terms of patients' improvement, but also professionals' satisfaction.

Therapeutic potentials of Festivals in Mental Hospitals

By virtue of the nature of illness and isolation and monotonous routine activities of the mental hospitals, most of the patients with a long stay of more than 5-10 years have inadequate touch with reality; they almost forget the community ways of living. Preparing them to participate in the festivals leads to re-orientation, resocialization and re-integration into active community life. Not only does it give pleasure but also encourages them to relearn the old skills with renewed enthusiasm.

Patients admitted to mental hospitals in addition to pharmacotherapy, require various socio and recreational therapies. Only when all these therapies are provided their recovery and improvement become

faster and better. Recent developments in the field of mental health lay emphasis on many socially oriented activities in order to positively change the stereotyped and lifeless activities of the hospitals. Planned and collective celebration of festivals become one of the important ways of adding life to the hospital milieu. In this context, the role played by the hospital personnel especially the psychiatric nurses is vital.

Preparation of patients for religious festivals

Depending on the occasions, the nurse should explain the importance of the festival and she should have a discussion with the patients in group setting. The main focus in such discussions is on sharing of their own experiences and memories of such occasions and the ways in which they wish to celebrate in the hospital. Many patients like this kind of approach. We find even the withdrawn patients are dragged by other enthusiastic patients to take part in the planning stages.

Various activities though look trivial have significant implications for patients habit training. For instance, patients getting up early in the morning, finishing daily chores, decorating the wards, wearing of new cloths, visiting temples and other related activities become exciting experiences for the patients. This encourages mutual help leadership qualities among the patients. They start helping in preparation of special foods and special outings.

Preparation of patients for national festivals

National festivals like, Independence day, Republic day and Children's Day provide similar opportunities for patients' active participation and enjoyment. Special preparations for participation in games and sports, cultural performances, are required on such occasions. Some specific responsibilities like arrangement of the stage and flag hoisting could be assigned to the patients. By doing so their involvement is intensified.

Periodical positive reinforcement, simple demonstrations and realistic expectations are the essential components of the preparatory phase for cultural programmes. Videorecording of the sessions and playing the same back to them serve as strong forces of motivation and happiness.

Considering the immense therapeutic potentials of preparation and involvement of the patients in the celebration of festivals in the hospital setting, it is suggested that such programmes, need to be replicated in other hospitals as well. This approach enriches the humanistic interaction and also stimulates community living experiences. When these activities become part of mental hospital life, no wonder, the phenomena of chronicity and social-breakdown syndrome vanish into thin air.

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