

## **Significance of Recovery Principles when providing Care to Individuals with Mental Health Conditions**

Traditionally, recovery in the medical field has always been paternalistic, where doctors consulted with patients, ordered laboratory tests, formed diagnoses, and prescribed a course of treatment. This paternalistic culture did not adopt a patient-centered approach when deciding on the treatment objectives, which meant that patient concerns were not voiced adequately and their cultural, social, and financial situations were not taken into account in the prescribed treatment regimen. In the field of psychiatry, doctors often focused on symptoms, assessment tests, rating scales, and standardized interviews to develop diagnoses and treatment plans. However, recovery in mental health is different than recovery in physical health, and so, psychiatrists constantly faced opposition and non-adherence to treatment in their approach. During the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recovery in mental health was established as a distinct area to be focused upon and several governmental and non-governmental organizations got involved to establish recovery principles for mental health issues to guide psychiatric practice (Jacob, 2015).

According to reports by people suffering from mental health conditions, recovery to them means regaining control of their lives more than complete relief from their symptoms. This approach, where control over life's problems is emphasized over total symptom resolution is known as the recovery model (Ramon et al., 2007). This model, in contrast to traditional psychiatric practice which concentrated on symptoms and assessment results, focuses on providing support and building resilience in patients. The recovery model is based on several principles such as hope and a belief that people with mental health conditions can have fulfilling lives. Therefore, under this model, recovery is a process rather than a treatment goal and provides a conceptual framework especially in the field of mental health (Davidson, 2005).

The principles that govern the recovery model for mental health conditions have led to the development of self-management strategies that allow individuals suffering from these conditions as well as their families to have more control over their treatment

goals and practices. Additionally, it allows the treatment to have more effect on the person rather than merely his/her symptoms and promotes the notion that recovery is a journey rather than a destination. Under these principles, recovery may not lead to an earlier phase of the person's life or the functioning of a normal person. However, along with its ups and downs, it can elevate the person currently suffering from a mental health condition to an as normal way of life as possible (Bonney and Stickley, 2008).

The recovery principles in the field of mental health help individuals with mental health conditions to move beyond the concept of existence and aim for a meaningful life. The principles aim to encourage these individuals to set new objectives in life and focus on achieving them. They also motivate them to have hobbies and bring about a sense of depth in their relationships so that these become their support system and aid the process of recovery. In the domain of mental health, recovery no longer means curing the illness; rather, it means taking control of their lives, nurturing their abilities, and fulfilling their dreams. The recovery principles provide a stark contrast to the traditional views of mental health illnesses which compartmentalize individuals suffering from these conditions and impose restrictions on them. Not only psychiatrists, but also the family members of these individuals have had very low expectations regarding their potential and abilities. Therefore, the recovery principles allow both the doctors as well as the family members to shift their expectations and provide a supportive environment for the development and recovery of individuals suffering from mental health conditions (Jacob and Patel, 2014).

One of the main objectives of having recovery principles is to ensure that psychiatrists are adopting best practices that support the holistic recovery of individuals living with mental health issues. These principles aim to reinforce that treatment outcomes might be unique to various individuals and these should be evaluated on individual contexts rather than a set treatment trajectory. They also aim to provide community-oriented outcomes wherein the individual experiences social inclusion and lives as a valued member of the society. Thus, by adopting a patient-centered approach, mental health recovery aims to help individuals learn to live with the problem and enhances their quality of lives (Australian Government, 2010).

The recovery principles are formulated such that they can integrate inputs and suggestions from individuals suffering from mental health conditions as well as their families in the provision of mental healthcare services. However, its success depends on several aspects, the most important of which is the doctor's hope and optimism in the recovery process while keeping in mind each patient's individual experiences and treatment goals. In certain cases, matters of citizenship and social inclusion may also contribute to the success of the recovery process apart from political and financial barriers. Other factors include identification of pathological deficits related to behavioural symptoms, requirements of healthcare organizations in accessing mental health services, and using best judgment to decide on the ideal course of action for each individual. In all such instances, recovery principles provide guidance by highlighting the treatment objectives of mental health conditions and the expected outcomes in a patient-centered approach (O'Keeffe et al., 2018).

Individually, the existence of mental health recovery principles provides the basis for a patient to lead a meaningful life and participate in family and community-level activities. These principles encompass a paradigm shift in our concept of cure of mental illnesses and enable the patient to have a normal and fulfilling life. Apart from this, the recovery principles are quite important at the institutional level too. Studies conducted in Europe have found that formulating treatment strategies based on the recovery principles have led to a marked reduction in the number of inpatients at mental healthcare institutions. This is a positive reflection on the entire mental healthcare providers' community who have adopted the recovery principles and incorporated them in their treatment strategies (Keet et al., 2019).

These recovery principles have served to become an important reform of mental health policies and practices by employing a patient-centered approach towards mental health recovery. It has enabled people to get involved in social and community activities, lead productive and successful lives despite having symptoms, and focus on recovery rather than cure of the illness. The establishment of recovery principles has led to the development of systems and services targeted to the cause of mental health recovery. Additionally, several individuals with mental health illnesses have advocated

for the use of recovery principles in the development of treatment plans and thereby, spread awareness to other members of the community. In contrast to the traditional views of mental health conditions to be debilitating, they are now viewed as illnesses that people can learn to live with and recover from in their lifetime (Davidson, 2016).

For instance, schizophrenia was once thought to be a serious mental health condition that marked a person for life. However, after the establishment of recovery principles, studies have found that up to 67% of people suffering from this condition, while following a treatment regimen based on the recovery principles have experienced significant relief from the symptoms. The outcomes varied in different people depending on individual contexts, where some people excelled in their careers while some others fared well in their relationships (Harrow et al., 2012). Also, people who were not on long-term antipsychotic medications had a better prognosis as compared to individuals who were on long-term medications (Wunderlink et al., 2013). These results prove that using recovery principles have had several positive effects in the community of individuals suffering from mental health conditions.

The most important reasons for communal marginalization of individuals with mental health illnesses are discrimination and social stigma. These two factors have been adequately addressed in recovery principles enabling these individuals to participate in community-based activities. Forming meaningful relationships with family members and members in the community plays an important role in the recovery of an individual by providing a support system along with a sense of achievement. It allows people suffering from mental health conditions to gain reassurance from their communities thereby boosting their self-esteem and allowing them to expand their thinking (Davidson et al., 2010).

In conclusion, the establishment and use of recovery principles for developing treatment strategies for people suffering from mental health conditions has brought about a paradigm shift in the field of mental healthcare. Its focus is on empowering individuals to have a meaningful life rather than on specifically addressing the symptoms of the mental health condition. This may mean that recovery is never complete; however, the person is capable of leading as normal a life as possible,

working towards his goals, and maintaining fulfilling relationships. At the institutional level, it has decreased the financial burden of mental health conditions by enabling patients to get discharged earlier, and avoiding re-hospitalization and rehabilitation. It has also allowed the mental health hospitals to accommodate people with more serious issues, so that the attention deserved by these individuals is appropriately meted out to all.

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