

Kiran Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline and Distribution of Psychiatric Drugs to PwMDs during COVID 19 Pandemic

EMPOWERMENT 3

Psychiatric drugs at easy prices delivered on time during lockdown

With the help of India Post, Muttukadu-based disabilities institute has been promptly sending the medicine to beneficiaries across Tamil Nadu



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Recently, intellectually-challenged Subulakshmi's family spent a few anxious days unsure if the psychiatric drug they placed an order for would reach them on time.

The family live in interior Tenkasi and due to the lockdown, travel to Chennai to collect the drug – available at a subsidised price at the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD) – was out of the question.

"She cannot miss taking the medicine – if she does, she gets epileptic seizures," says T. Mahalakshmi, Subulakshmi's sister. Prior to the lockdown, a caregiver and the beneficiary would make a trip to NIEPMD for therapy and also buy the medicines.

Mahalakshmi is grateful to the institute for sending it through India Post.

Similarly, PS Gokul from Thiruvandiyur received the psychiatric drug through post – his differently-abled son needs it to regulate his sleep pattern.

The 24/7 mental health rehabilitation helpline – Kiran (1800-599-0019) – started by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has gone beyond its call of duty by making sure that psychiatric drugs reach the beneficiary on time during the lockdown.

"Close to 25 per cent of the calls that came to our helpline numbers last month were seeking psychiatric drugs as they had difficulty getting them either due to the pricing or non-availabili-

ty," says Rajesh Ramachandran, Rehabilitation Officer, NIEPMD.

The Institute is one of the coordinators of Kiran, responsible for attending to calls from both Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

"Some of the calls coming to the helpline are the result of anxiety from not getting the medicine, so we started dispatching them," says Rajesh, adding that some of the beneficiaries are in the database of the institute and many others are new.

Due to the ongoing lockdown in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, many are not able to travel to the NIEPMD campus in Muttukadu to buy the drug. Even prior to the lockdown, the institute met some of the requests as caregivers wanted to avoid the risk of travelling and contracting the virus.

"Through India Post we have dispatched medicines

Representational image; and a cover signifying the dispatch of medicine.

to even remote villages," says Rajesh, adding that some of the staff have also come forward to bear the expense.

"In some cases, unless a psychiatrist examines the beneficiary, drugs are not prescribed, so we made arrangements through video call."

The skeletal staff at the Kovalam sub-post office have also risen to the occasion by shipping these packages on time.

"Since the lockdown began, on an average, every day we have been booking 30 to 40 consignments, mainly those containing medicines from NIEPMD and from another mental health centre in Kovalam," says a staff from the post office.

"Due to the lockdown, the dispatch van comes by 2 p.m. as against 4.30 p.m. but we request the person to wait till we sort out the items and mark each of them," adds the staff.

Helplines to heal the mind

From September 2020 to March 2021, Kiran helpline number (1800-599-0019) has attended to 1724 calls from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities, Chennai is one of the coordinators of this initiative.

The hotline available in 13 languages caters to people in distress, mental health emergency and psychological issues caused due to the pandemic. The calls are handled by psychiatric social workers who forward them to clinical psychologists depend-

ing on the nature of help required.

"Fifty-six per cent of the callers who called the helpline number are men and 40 per cent are women," says Rajesh Ramachandran, Rehabilitation Officer, NIEPMD. Our data also shows that a majority of the callers are in the age group of 15 to 40 years, he says.

The operators have been sensitised not to ask the caller for name or any other details. Anxiety and depression are some of the top concerns fielding by the mental health professionals.