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Early detection key to address mental illness, delay may prove fatal: Experts

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& Tanushree Das | 11A

Kolkata: Signs of mental illness are often ignored or taken lightly, which aggravate the condition of patients who can recover sufficiently with timely assistance, said experts on World Mental Health Day on Monday. Those with mental issues should be screened, counselled and provided treatment as early as possible to prevent suicidal tendencies. Family members should take the first step and offer help rather than overlooking the signs of distress, they pointed out.

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

The theme of Mental Health Day this year is making mental health and well-being for all a global priority.

Signs of mental illness are ignored due to lack of awareness about it, the knowledge that it can be treated and the stigma attached to it, said consultant psychiatrist J Ram. "While a lot more now acknowledge and recognize mental illness as a disease, there's still a tendency to ignore it. This can have multiple consequences on the

'THERE IS A TENDENCY TO IGNORE IT'

Warning signs

- ▶ Previous suicide attempt
- ▶ Mental disorders
- ▶ Harmful use of alcohol and other substances
- ▶ Job or financial loss
- ▶ Chronic pain and illness
- ▶ Family history of suicide
- ▶ Genetic and biological factors



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J Ram | CONSULTANT
PSYCHIATRIST

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Minu Budhia | CARING MINDS FOUNDER

individual, the family and the nation as a whole. Aggravation could not only jeopardize the life of the patient, it can derail the family as a whole. Just as any other illness has a cost impact in terms of earnings and contribution to the economy, mental illness, too, has it," said Ram.

Early signs are not difficult to recognize but measures are taken late, according to psychotherapist Minu Budhia, founder of Caring Minds. "If you are not able to contribute to your personal, social,

professional and family life, you need help. Not being able to handle the stress of daily life, feeling sad or low very frequently or having extreme mood swings are the first signs of mental illness," said Budhia.

She added that it was not easy to push oneself out of this without help. "You don't need to have a serious mental health issue to seek help. Once you have these symptoms, it's good to seek expert help immediately," she said.

Most mental illnesses are re-

cognized after the patient has developed suicidal tendencies, said president of Indian Psychiatric Society Gautam Saha. Studies show that more than half of those who choose to end their lives visit a physician within a month of their suicide, which stresses the need for recognition of the signs of extreme distress or despair among these people.

"Around 40%-60% of those committing suicide visit a general physician shortly before ending their lives. In most cases, these doctors fail to recognize that they are in extreme distress. So, we need trained people to identify these potentially suicidal section and initiate measures," said Saha.

Ram pointed out that busy urban life was leading to a disconnect and isolation that often encouraged suicidal tendencies. "A large number of youngsters, for instance, are under tremendous pressure to perform. Unfortunately, it is the parents who are often responsible for this. What they don't realize is that education has nothing to do with doing well in exams. But that is exactly what students are expected to do. And those who fail to live up to parents' expectations have to go through stress," said Ram.