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The banner features three main sections. On the left, a photo of students is next to the PGDQF logo, which stands for 'Post Graduate Diploma in Quantitative Finance' for the '2015-16' academic year, described as a 'One Year, Full Time Program'. The middle section has a blue background with white text: 'Most of the financial professionals know the risk. But only few can understand and QUANTify it.' To the right, the NiSM logo is displayed with a crest, and below it, the text 'Last Date to Apply: July 15, 2015'. On the far right, a red circular icon with a plus sign is next to the text 'Give a missed call on +91 82860 86340 to receive a call back'.

Vandrevala foundation moves to improve Maharashtra mental health care

IANS September 21, 2014 Last Updated at 12:12 IST

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[London](#) Sep 21 (IANS/RAY) The Vandrevala Foundation, whose charitable activities include mental health care, has submitted a plan to the [Maharashtra](#) government to improve services in mental health institutions in the state. This move follows the publication of a [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) report which places [India](#) as the world's leader in suicides.

According to the Foundation, India has 43 mental health hospitals, all established before 1947 and many of them so abysmal that people with mental illness don't seek help at such places. So, the Foundation's proposal to the Maharashtra government is a first step to correct this state of affairs.

The WHO report estimated that out of 804,000 suicides worldwide in 2012, over 258,000 of them were in India - 99,997 women and 158,098 men - with the highest rate being seen among Indians aged 15 to 29. India's suicide rate was 21.1 per 100,000 people, according to the report.

The Foundation was not surprised by the WHO report. In a statement issued in London, Arun John, Executive Vice President of the Foundation, said: "Our counsellors are on the front lines of suicide prevention, so they know all too well what's going on out there." It has also entered into an agreement with the Directorate General of Shipping in India to serve as the official mental health helpline for Indian sailors around the globe and their families.

The Vandrevalla Foundation, established by a London-based billionaire couple, Priya Hiranandani-Vandrevalla and Cyrus Vandrevalla (who are originally from Mumbai), launched a "Mental Health - India" initiative in 2009. This operates a 24 hour helpline in western and northern India manned by professional counsellors. One of its objectives is to prevent possible attempts at suicide. Advice and assistance is available in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and English.

"We decided the helpline had to be our first priority because in India, many individuals have no one to turn to for help," said Hiranandani-Vandrevalla.

She added: "We believe it's time to treat people with mental health disorders and illnesses with dignity and respect so that they will seek the help they need. When more people realize that all mental health problems are treatable, we can start to move beyond stigma and discrimination and bring people living with mental illness back into the mainstream of society."

"We believe that with timely intervention and support, both suicides and suicide attempts can be prevented," added Dr John.

Hiranandani-Vandrevalla explained: "When Cyrus and I decided to make mental health a focal point for our Foundation, we had no illusions about the immensity of the issue we were trying to tackle." She elaborated: "It's also been shown that mental illness can have a huge knock-on effect on life expectancy. A recent University of Oxford study concluded that serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and recurrent depression reduce life expectancy anywhere from seven to 20 years-a loss of years that's equivalent to or worse than that for heavy smokers."

In five years since its launch the Vandrevalla Foundation has handled 60,000 cases. "We address the full spectrum of mental health issues-from anxiety and depression through to schizophrenia and suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts," says Dr. John.

"Although mental health problems and illnesses are disorders of the brain," says Dr. John, "too many people still view them as a 'character flaw' or a 'personal weakness' or even 'demonic possession', and as a result a majority of people with mental health problems won't seek help for fear of being labeled negatively."

--IANS/RAY

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