Development and Implementation of a Model Telepsychiatry Application for Delivering Mental Healthcare in Remote Areas

The PGIMER was the nodal centre for this project with three peripheral centers at Srinagar, J &K, Srinagar, Uttrakhand, and Bilaspur in Himachal Pradesh. The PGIMER telepsychiatric project has followed a novel model of training and enabling non-specialists (i.e., general physicians and para-professionals) at remote sites to diagnose and treat mental illnesses on their own, with minimal supervision from the nodal centre. The major achievement of this project has been the development of a net-based computerized application for diagnosis and treatment of common psychiatric disorders in adults and children. This structured, fully automated application with an in-built logical support system enables the user to diagnose and treat psychiatric disorders independently. It replaces the need for a psychiatrist and serves as a "virtual psychiatrist" instead. The Application has two interlinked parts, one for diagnosis and the other for treatment and follow-up of psychiatric disorders. Separate versions for adult and children/adolescents have been developed. The Application is available in both English and Hindi. The Application has been used in more than 2500 patients. It has also been subjected to extensive checks by comparing the system diagnosis and treatment plan with that by an expert and qualified psychiatrist for its performance. These checks have revealed that the application is an efficient means of providing psychiatric care. It is brief, simple and highly user-friendly. At the same time it ensures generation of accurate diagnoses and a high standard of treatment. People with limited experience in treating psychiatric disorders can be trained to use the application after 10-12 hours of training, which is itself conducted over the net. The team at the PGIMER is currently working on refining this application further, as well as extending the project to additional centres in other states. If these efforts are successful, this application has the potential to be a cost-effective solution for the mental health gap that exists at the national level in India.

To summarise, this Application named *"psychiatristonweb"* is knowledge based, comprehensive, credible, valid & reliable, web based & online, and self-educative. Thus, the *"psychiatristonweb"* model has the potential to be used asan instant and economical solution to the deficient number of psychiatrists in the country by providing comprehensive, high quality and credible mental health care to patients living in remote unserved areas near their homes by empowering non-mental health professionals. Moreover, no such system exists in India or even in the world.

The project project has been awarded Skoch Order of Merit as India's best Governance Project 2014; and also conferred award of excellence for Highest Independent Honour in India the 37th Skoch Summit on "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance" in New Delhi on Sept. 19-20, 2014. This project has also been awarded for "Best Research" in many national conferences of professional bodies and societies in India.

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Telepsychiatry Centres at all the three remote sites: