

SUICIDE AMONG DOCTORS: A SILENT EMERGENCY?

Prof. Dr. Sandip Subedi

Associate Executive Editor

INTRODUCTION

Doctors are borne with crucial responsibility of saving life from the moment a life is being born. These doctors who have been entrusted with the wellbeing of others are becoming the victims of suicide. Since last few years we have been frequently listening to the news of doctors committing suicide in Nepal. This suggests that, within the health care centers, where lives are saved and healing takes place, a silent emergency is unfolding.

In the United States of America, an estimated 300 to 400 doctors die by suicide each year, a rate of 28 to 40 per 100,000 which is more than double that of general population.¹ Though data pertaining to suicide among doctors in Nepal is not available, media reports indicate that there is a rising trend among doctors' suicide.² This rise in suicide among doctors requires immediate attention from the society and the country too.

Though, the exact reason for this increasing suicide rate is difficult to pinpoint, we can surely say that the following reasons have a significant role in this increasing suicide rate among Nepalese doctors'.

1. Lots of mental health challenges due to the high patient load, long duty hours & high sensitivity of the role of doctors.
2. Lots of stresses in the workplace leading to poor mental health in the workplace.
3. Lack of financial and social security for doctors in the country.
4. Lack of safe outlet to talk about the emotional impact of their work can lead doctors to carry the stress of their work beyond the consulting room, putting them at risk of psychiatric illnesses.
5. The stigma surrounding mental illnesses causes fear in doctors for seeking help for their mental health issues.
6. Easy accessibility to the means of suicide also increases the risk of suicide.

What can be done to reduce it?

Prevention is better than cure. So, it is imperative that physicians recognize the importance of self-care, model wellness behaviors and encourage others to do the same. The role of organization in creating a safe and supportive atmosphere in the workplace is instrumental in addressing physician distress.

The first thing that needs to be done to reduce this high suicide rate is to identify mental health issues as early as possible and seek treatment. For this, we should remain vigilant for signs of burnout and depression within ourselves as well as our colleagues. As responsible citizens, we must not hesitate to seek help when we recognize that something is not right.

Stigma surrounding mental illness is very high even in medical field. So, establishing a confidential support system consisting of Psychiatrist, Psychologist and counsellors can be of paramount importance in providing psychiatric services to the doctors in need.

In spite of demanding schedules and responsibilities, We should also promote work life balance for doctors. There should be reasonable working hours, adequate rest and time for personal life that can promote mental well being, reduce stress, and foster a sense of fulfillment.

Most importantly, ensuring the financial and social security of doctors is of utmost importance. This can help doctors to contribute to the society even better.

CONCLUSION

Suicidal death of a doctor is not a personal/familial tragedy, It is a failure of the whole society and the health system of the country. Since doctors are gem of the society, they deserve even more care and compassion that they freely give to the society when needed. The reported increase in the number of doctors' suicide should be understood as the silent emergency that needs immediate attention to prevent failure in the health system.

REFERENCES

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