

PRESS RELEASE

Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee calls for integrated approach to combat mental illness at first ever *Live Love Laugh – a lecture series with Deepika Padukone*

The lecture, organized as part of an annual series by The Live Love Laugh Foundation (TLLLF) aims to shape the conversation around mental health

New Delhi, 16 September 2019: The Live, Love, Laugh Foundation (TLLLF), a charitable trust that was set up in 2015 to give hope to every person experiencing stress, anxiety and depression (SAD), held the first edition of Live, Love, Laugh - a lecture series with Deepika Padukone.

The maiden lecture was delivered last night by Pulitzer prize winning author and Padma Shri Awardee, Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee. The aim of the annual lecture series is to invite the world's foremost thinkers and achievers to present their ideas that could help shape the global mental health narrative.

The event also featured a video message by Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Government of India who said: "According to WHO (World Health Organisation), Health is defined as a state of physical, mental, social and psychological wellbeing of an individual. It is not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. The definition itself makes it amply clear that mental health is an important component of the overall health spectrum. I wish to congratulate The Live Love and Laugh Foundation and Deepika Padukone for flagging this issue before the Indian society."

The lecture was attended by decision makers including Dr Indu Bhushan, CEO, Ayushman Bharat; Amitabh Kant, CEO, Niti Aayog; Dr Renu Swarup, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology; Dr Balaram Bhargava, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research; Professor Gagandeep Kang, Executive Director of the Translational Health Science & Technology Institute; Sanjeev Sanyal, Principal Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India and Shakti Sinha, Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

In his talk, Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee, spoke about how cancer in the 50's, was a stigmatized illness with patients facing potent forces of discrimination, fear and neglect. "When anyone was diagnosed with cancer, the blame for the disease was carried by the person themselves. Patients with cancer were pushed to the back of the hospital. Mental health issues carry a similar stigma.

He centred his talk around three forces, which he felt were needed to come together to address mental health. “The first force is political – for mental health to be recognized as a public health crisis, a national issue. There is a need to create national institutes of mental health. Stakeholders in the political domain must come together and work towards this common goal.

“The second force is social – this will entail advocacy and awareness around destigmatizing mental health. The idea of ‘you bring the disease to yourself’ must be erased. The idea is to remould another disease with the learnings around destigmatizing cancer.

“The third and final set of forces is biological, genetic or pharmaceutical, to an extent. This entails making efforts and carrying out research to understand the molecular mechanism so that people would not be victimized.

“Today, biological insights are being extended to mental health. For instance, there are 100 gene variances that contribute to schizophrenia yet there is a clear environmental aspect to this. The same is true for other mental illnesses as well. The challenge for the next generation thus lies in understanding these two components. I call this the Yin/Yang puzzle. While the Yin – the genetic – part is solved, the Yang – or the environmental milieu – still needs to be addressed”.

Dr Mukherjee noted that progress was being made and that “there is more conversation, advocacy and philanthropy around mental health”.

“The lecture series is an initiative to learn from some of the greatest minds of the 21st century, said Deepika Padukone, Founder, TLLLF. “It is important for people who are passionate about mental health to talk about their journey. Illnesses such as AIDS and cancer, have successfully managed to break through the stigma and I believe there is a lot for us to learn from those examples.

“Four years ago, we wouldn’t even talk to our families about how we felt emotionally, let alone seeking professional help. Four years on, we as a nation, have come a long way in bringing that conversation to the fore.” added Deepika Padukone.

“Dr Mukherjee’s talk has laid the foundation for more such discussions and dialogue as we seek to expand the conversation on mental health. Having a speaker of Dr Mukherjee’s caliber deliver the inaugural Live Love Laugh lecture is extremely encouraging for us. Also, we are very pleased with the support we have received from our health minister Shri Harsh Vardhan ji as

well as from senior decision makers in government,” said Anna Chandy, Chairperson of The Live Love Laugh Foundation.

“I am glad that the event was organized to destigmatize mental health issues. People do not want to own up to issues of mental health and we need more people to open up. Unless we acknowledge the problem, we can’t find a solution,” said Dr Indu Bhushan, CEO, Ayushman Bharat.

“Ayushman Bharat covers all secondary and tertiary health conditions including a large number of mental health conditions. Anyone with those conditions is provided free treatment. Ayushman Bharat covers the poorest 40% of the population in the country. This is the segment where mental health issues go unnoticed. Ayushman Bharat is going to help those who may have not received treatment for mental health so far,” he added.

Taj Mahal, New Delhi was the hospitality sponsor for the event. Other sponsors included Asian Paints, Tissot, Code Silver and EazyDiner Prime.