

Train parents of autistic children: experts

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In the absence of enough schools and professionals to take care of autistic children in India, it is only through 'parent empowerment' that proper care can be given to those suffering from such social and behav-

ioral disorders.

This is what Ms Merry Barua, who has been running an NGO for autistic children for the past 17 years in Delhi, strongly feels. More than 30 parents of autistic children and 50 professionals attended a workshop organised by the Psychiatry Department of the Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) here today.

Ms Barua, mother of a 22-year-old autistic child, has got training at the University of North Carolina. She is the founding member of the World Autism Organisation. She said since there were not enough schools for autistic children, the best way out was that the parents must equip themselves with skills that could help in providing the best care to their children.

The head of the Psychiatry Department, Dr S.B. Chavan, said one of the major problems was the denial on the part of parents, due to social stigma attached with the disorder, to accept that their child was suffering from autism.

"Autism is a spectrum of disorders that affects all areas of development of the child who faces problem in communication, socialisation and thinking. Generally, it is not identified at an early stage," said Dr Priti Arun.

She said autism affected about 2 to 4 children out of every 10,000 children in India. "Almost 60 per cent autistic children suffer from mental retardation and being unable to attend normal school, they have to be sent to special institutes," she said. Since there was a shortage of such schools, especially in North India, the best way out was that the parents should attend workshops or undergo special training in the interest of their children.

She said till date there was no definite treatment for autism and desperate parents try all kinds of therapies, including those recommending particular drugs and special diet. She felt that another area of concern was the low awareness about autism, both in the public and the medical fraternity.

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