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A call for disability inclusion that must be heeded

It is almost a month since the International Day for Persons with Disabilities (December 3) passed. Yet, we must pause and consider the importance of novel and innovative solutions that enhance two important outcomes for the people affected, i.e., activities of daily life and quality of life. By calling for "transformative solutions that will lead to inclusive development, leaving no one behind", the United Nations has shifted the focus back on innovations that reduce disability. In the important medical field of "neuropsychiatry" that straddles the brain-mind interface, there have been several treatment innovations with the potential to enhance outcomes – and the focus of this article.

Neuropsychiatric disorders are, by definition, disabling and present themselves across the lifespan. These range from autism, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and intellectual disability in childhood (317 million), and to mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, eating disorder, addictions, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder through adolescence and adult life (167 million adolescents and 970 million people, globally), traumatic brain injury, spinal injury, epilepsy and headache across the lifespan, stroke, neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's dementia and Parkinson's disease that appear in old age (276 million neurologically affected individuals in all).

Revamp rehabilitation services

With such a large burden of people affected around the globe, it is rational to assume that rehabilitation needs are plentiful. According to the World Health Organization's Global Burden of Disease study, 2019, 2.41 billion individuals had conditions that would benefit from rehabilitation, contributing to 310 million Years of Living with Disabilities (YLD). This number had increased by 63% from 1990 to 2019. However, with rehabilitation often being seen as a



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There needs to be a focus on solutions that enhance the activities of daily life and the quality of life for the disabled

disability-specific service, needed by only a few, it has, despite its individual and societal benefits, not been prioritised in countries and is traditionally under-resourced.

With neurology and psychiatry being closely linked, there exists a continuum of needs between these conditions, often with considerable overlap. Rehabilitation services must, therefore, be designed to address the wide spectrum of neurological and mental health problems as opposed to being narrow in concept and specialist led. There is a need to build awareness in the community that disablement does not need to be endured and can be treated, even reversed, in a proportion of cases.

There is also a need to encourage medical professionals, medical service providers (government, private and non-profit) as well as public health professionals to consider rehabilitation as an essential service. Beyond doctors and nurses, rehabilitation across the lifespan requires a range of professionals: physical and occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychological therapists and professional caregivers. Enhancing these professional profiles, improving training, creating mainstream opportunities for career development and empowering their professional growth is important in order for services to develop and evolve. Further, it is widely understood today that rehabilitation services need to be multidisciplinary, multicomponent and holistic. Developing such service paradigms is crucial.

Tap scientific advances

There are unique paradigms of care that have emerged through scientific advances that we must consider. A host of non-invasive brain stimulation (NIBS) procedures have proved themselves to be very useful in the care and rehabilitation of neurological and mental health conditions. Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) as a mainstream treatment for

both depression and obsessive compulsive disorder and as an adjuvant treatment for diverse conditions: tremors of Parkinson's disease, Schizophrenia (hallucinations and other psychotic symptoms), addictions, pain and spasticity management especially that following strokes and traumatic brain injury, adolescent and adult Autism Spectrum Disorder, aggression and so on. An allied technique, Functional (or peripheral) Magnetic Stimulation (FMS), is also available today for pain, spasticity, incontinence and other disabling neurological symptoms.

Another NIBS technique with great promise is transcranial electrical stimulation (TES) with its many sub-types (direct current, alternate current and random noise). The treatment has shown itself to be successful in improving memory and cognition, mood and behaviour, anxiety, tremors, confusion and delirium, and sleep disorders. It has the advantage of being portable and bedside. In the post-COVID-19 era, another treatment that has assumed importance is transcutaneous auricular vagus nerve stimulation (tAVNS), vagus nerve abnormalities being responsible for a host of long COVID-19 symptoms. Developed as a treatment for epilepsy, this is currently being investigated for depression, migraine and dysautonomia.

Need for collaboration

With a billion people with disabilities worldwide, 80% in developing countries, the United Nation's call for disability inclusion being central to the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind assumes importance. People in vulnerable situations such as persons with disabilities are the most excluded and left behind, especially in times of crisis, as was apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is crucial for governments, the public and private sectors to collaborate and find innovative solutions for and with persons with disabilities, to make the world a more accessible and equitable place.

EVA STALIN IAS

Tipping back towards chaos, with Trump

The 2024 United States presidential election is beginning to look increasingly like a referendum on Donald Trump. The 45th President leads not only all other Republican Party candidates by a considerable margin in voter surveys but also appears to be dominating the incumbent, Democrat Joe Biden, including in certain swing states. Yet, there could not be a more polarising figure at the forefront of electoral politics in the country.

On the one hand, Mr. Trump is reaping the hurricane for a variety of alleged improprieties including, most notoriously, his role in egging on a mob that attacked the U.S. Capitol buildings on January 6, 2021. This egregious act, which shook the country's democratic credentials, marked the culmination of months of election result denial by Mr. Trump's campaign, including active efforts to overturn the count in states such as Georgia.

Now, in addition to indictments for election interference in Georgia, and at the federal level for his role in encouraging the attack on the Capitol, the former President faces criminal cases regarding allegations that he unlawfully held classified documents at his residence in Mar-a-Lago, Florida, after demitting office, and that he paid hush money to an adult film star to cover up an affair. Additionally, the Supreme Court of the state of Colorado recently barred his name from the election ballot citing a violation of the Section 3 of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. constitution, known as the "insurrection clause", which disqualifies individuals engaging in insurrection and rebellion from holding public office.

Profiting from trials

One view of these indictments and the personal appearances in court that they will necessitate is that they are likely to hobble Mr. Trump's election campaign plans for 2024. Yet, if the media circus and general public outcry accompanying each episode of Mr. Trump surrendering to the authorities for processing are measures of the impact that these allegations have on his popularity, it is obvious that Mr. Trump has only emerged stronger and is seen more as a victim of political vindictiveness than ever before.

His soaring popularity in the polls of late perhaps reflects, then, the belief among voters that Mr. Trump's agenda is not complete and indeed that Trumpism as a political force is yet in a nascent stage. It is worth parsing Mr. Trump's unique matrix of pronouncements on domestic and foreign policy issues to better understand why voters might throng to his campaign next year.

Domestically, the rise of Trumpism reflects the vociferous reassertion of the white, straight male in American culture – who, under its banner, has



Narayan Lakshman

With less than a year left for the 2024 U.S. presidential election, America cannot ignore the standing of Donald Trump, its 45th President, and its most polarising figure in its electoral politics

taken up a position in opposition to the liberal value of constitutional equality for minorities of all hues – immigrants, African Americans, the LGBTQ community, women, and Muslims, to name a few. What began as a silent cry for help against the ravages of economic globalisation and the migration of manufacturing jobs overseas – the so-called Rust Belt effect that propelled Mr. Trump to victory in 2016 – rapidly and conveniently degenerated into overtly racist dog-whistles by Make America Great Again (MAGA) Republicans across the country and bisecting all class barriers within this cohort.

Rewriting institutional rules, strategic biases

If nativist populism was the wave that the Trump campaign rode into the Oval Office, they wasted little time in cementing their political gains by insidious institutional reforms including, most notably, setting the stage for further dismantling the liberal governance consensus by tipping the U.S. Supreme Court 9-3 in favour of unapologetic conservatism.

The unfinished agenda here is to continue the attack on reproductive rights; to roll back laws designed to control gun proliferation, thereby doing little to alleviate the anxieties of minorities at the receiving end of police violence; to keep up the disparaging rhetoric targeting immigrants as such and undocumented workers in particular, especially to garner political capital on the issue of border crossings in the south; and to push back against a host of other liberal-era reforms passed under Mr. Biden and his democratic predecessor Barack Obama, including health-care reform laws, minimum wage requirements, environmental protection measures and many others.

In the realm of foreign policy, under Mr. Trump the U.S. exited a range of international organisations and treaties, including the World Health Organization, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Climate Agreement, UNESCO, the Iran nuclear deal, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Relief and Works Agency, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces arms control treaty with Russia. His administration also either blocked some aspects of the functioning of or publicly disparaged the World Trade Organization and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In some of the above cases, the philosophical "principle" underlying the U.S.'s exit from an international obligation was simply the notion that Washington was better off shifting its policy gaze inward and allowing other world powers to do more heavy lifting for international institutions – seen as but one step required to Make America Great Again.

Yet, the other dimension of the U.S.'s global retreat contained a strategic element – such as

the view in the Trump White House that UNESCO had an anti-Israel bias, or that while Washington might continue to aid Ukraine in repelling the Russian invasion, more support for NATO was required of western European powers who, after all, were far closer to the conflict zone to their east.

Indeed, if Mr. Trump romps back to power next year, it could well be expected that his White House would capitalise on the disenchantment that both the liberal left and the pro-Israel right in the U.S. have felt with regards to the Biden strategy for the war in Gaza. According to a recent Times/Siena poll, 57% of registered voters disapprove of the manner in which the Biden administration has managed the conflict, while young voters, aged 18-29 years disapprove overwhelmingly, at 72%.

Similarly, the House of Representatives, which is Republican-controlled and increasingly bowing to the wishes of MAGA lawmakers including the House Freedom Caucus members, has come close to defunding for Ukraine's war efforts and may yet do so, even in the face of Speaker Mike Johnson urging that Washington's support to Kyiv should continue.

Finally, while the trade war launched by Trump 1.0 against China and other nations marked the triumph of domestic populism over international economic common sense, Trump 2.0, if it comes to pass, may well apply a more *laissez-faire* approach. This might imply turning a blind eye to a regional hegemon's aggressive territorial ambitions in the South China Sea and across other parts of Asia, so long as Beijing placates Washington with favourable trade and investment terms.

The future of Trumpism

All this is in the realm of what might be, extrapolating from how the first wave of Trumpism reshaped institutional reality, redefined the limits of political correctness and rewrote the core tenets of American democracy. Even as Mr. Trump learns – perhaps not the lessons liberals would expect him to – from the slew of indictments that he has been slapped with, Trumpism can equally be expected to be transmogrified into a different beast, with new tactics and responses to a changed ground reality in 2024.

Nevertheless, the troubling question that his rise in 2016 begged still remains: can the U.S. ever hope to bridge the partisan gap and transcend the bitter polarisation that has become the norm, impacting every socio-economic issue that it grapples with? Maybe a future election could hold out hope for this collective healing to occur; but 2024 does not look promising in this context.