

**SPECIAL ARTICLE:
SOUL CARE TERRACE - NURTURING THE SOULS**

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Abstract

Institutionalization of mentally ill patients throughout the history have plethora of negative connotations attached to it. One most momentous is the feeling of entrapment, compromising autonomy. In Pakistan models of provision of community psychiatric care are still developing. Institutionalization is deliberated where mental health professionals are dealing with severe mental health issues. Providing a safe green space for such people is a blessing in disguise which will in turn help in healthier outcome and conceivable healing and rehabilitation. A green outdoor space crafted with empathetic dedication, is one of its kind initiative taken at Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital. We have named this space as Soul Care Terrace. We envision Soul Care Terrace to not only contribute towards recovery but also add a valuable data through research.

Historical Perspective

Until early 20th century, asylums were considered as the main form of care for patients having serious mental illnesses but that started transforming with the work of many especially Goffman¹. Before these efforts made to deinstitutionalize psychiatric care, the indoor psychiatry facilities resembled prisons like institutes² making patients placed in those institutes lose their usual identities. Deinstitutionalization made it possible that the mentally ill patients received least restrictive means of treatment in least restrictive environment in a more open community based care. The effects of deinstitutionalization vary across countries based on their health care and social welfare systems as well as the specific sets of national traditions, socio-cultural context, and the level of available resources³. In a country like Pakistan and its scarce resources, it is common to approach spiritual and traditional healers for physical and especially for mental illnesses⁴. In Pakistan institutionalization is still considered as a mainstay treatment for the sufferers of severe mental health disorders⁵ and the persisting stigma associated with mental health has left this population at a disadvantage.

Introduction

The foreword by Margaret Chan, MD, to the World Health Organization's Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 stated, "good mental health enables people to realize their potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities⁶. Recently published data from a randomized clinical trial suggests that the greening of vacant lots can result in meaningful reductions in psychological distress⁷. This can help in improving mental health in (1) restoring capacities, (2) building capacities, and (3) reducing harm⁸. Green spaces have become essential in the face of increasing globalization and modernization⁹, which have adversely affected lifestyles and immunity to the absence of green zones. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that urban green spaces are a "necessary component for delivering healthy, sustainable,

livable conditions” and have highlighted the need for evidence to support more effective urban planning (World Health Organization, 2016)¹⁰. Another scoping review showed that positive associations between mental health and green space characteristics¹¹. While policymakers address the lack of recreational areas, providing such spaces to hospitalized patients suffering from severe mental health disorders remains a challenge, especially in countries like Pakistan that are still evolving from traditional psychiatric practices.

Initiative at Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital

Keeping in mind and addressing the multidimensional impact of green spaces on mental health, Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital, conceived the concept of "Soul Care Terrace". With the help and support of like-minded people keen to promote mental health we crafted a safe haven for the most marginalized people i.e. suffering from mental health illnesses. This innovative project aimed to infuse a much-needed green touch into psychiatric care facilities, breaking away from the prison-like settings that stigmatized mental health patients.

Design's Concept

The department members from consultants (Dr Rabbia Mushtaq and Dr Fariha Iqbal) to all post graduate residents (Dr. Asfia Waseem, Dr. Juhaina Azhar, Dr Hafsa Arshad, Dr Hassan Iqbal, Dr Minnahil Ali and Dr. Rubab Zehra) meticulously designed each and every aspect of the “Soul Care Terrace”. The team left no stone unturned in transforming this dream into a reality. The all use of cement ensures minimal maintenance efforts and resistance to natural elements. This terrace features spacious sitting areas, a screening zone with projector settings, faux grass patches, an artificial rockery with a natural soothing sound of waterfall and illuminated by gentle lights, and a small barbeque area. Additionally, a decorative wall adorned with hanging plants further enhances the aesthetics, creating a tranquil environment. The walls, reinforced to prioritize safety and well-being, reflects a collective labor of love from individuals passionate about psychiatry and hence a provided our patients with a secure place to let go of the worries at least for a bit.

Changing Reality

In a country where patients battling mental health challenges face stigmatization and mistreatment, improving their in-care experience sets a precedence for their headway in the outside world. It additionally poses a crucial question: Do we want our patients treated worse than convicted criminals or with humane care and empathy? The "Soul Care Terrace" becomes a symbol of the department's commitment to changing the narrative surrounding mental health.

Future Plans and Research Initiatives

Looking ahead Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital, envisions not only maintaining the "Soul Care Terrace" but also plans to expand its impact through research initiatives. The department is committed to conducting studies to quantify the positive impact of this innovative space on the mental health of hospitalized patients. By collecting data and analyzing outcomes, we aim to contribute valuable insights to the broader field of psychiatric care and rehabilitation. With our research we aim to further emphasize the importance of green spaces in the healing process.

Conclusion

Amidst the comfort of today's world, the lives of those afflicted with mental health disorders often remain disadvantaged by the challenges they face. The "Soul Care Terrace" stands as a testament to our department's dedication to offering a small yet impactful stride towards reducing the stigma and offering enhanced care to patients battling psychiatric illnesses. We envision the Soul Care Terrace becoming a sanctuary for rejuvenation and healing—a tangible commitment to fostering empathy and understanding for those in need.

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