

Disabilities: Whenever there is Help, there is Hope

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Introduction

Disabilities are defined as significant long term impairment in an individual's ability to perform daily life activities that results from an injury, illness, or otherwise. The 3rd of December has been assigned by the United Nations as the annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) to attract the politicians' and public's attention to the handicapping issues which disabled persons face in their communities across the globe and have deleterious impact on their quality of life. The slogan of 2018's celebration was empowerment, inclusion, and equity of Persons with disabilities.

What are the types of disabilities?

Disabilities could be motor (gross and or fine), sensory (auditory, visual, or talking disability), mental (intellectual, learning, or neurodevelopmental), or physical (as a consequence of a chronic physical illness). An individual may suffer from one disability or more; multiple disabilities (e.g. motor and visual) are much more handicapping than single ones.

Etiology of disabilities; Are they preventable?

Disabilities could result from genetic, environmental, or combined genetic and environmental factors (i.e. multifactorial). Genetic causes of disabilities include chromosomal aberrations (as Down Syndrome), single gene mutations (as inborn errors of metabolism), multifactorial disorders (as autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), and disorders resulting from non-traditional inheritance (as mitochondrial disorders and genomic imprinting). It is worthy to mention that consanguinity that is still a common tradition in many communities like ours in Egypt increases the risk of occurrence of congenital malformations, autosomal recessive disorders, and multifactorial disorders.

Reducing consanguinity and implementing efficient prenatal diagnosis and neonatal screening programs are very helpful in reducing genetic causes of disabilities.

On the other hand, exposure to environmental hazards (as intrauterine exposure to teratogen, perinatal trauma or hypoxia, heavy metal intoxication, central nervous system infections, and car accidents) represents a substantial proportion of the overall etiology

of disabilities that could be prevented by collaborative efforts to reduce the exposure to such environmental hazards.

Impact of Disabilities

Disabilities; if not dealt with efficiently, have deleterious impacts on all life aspects of persons who are suffering from them whether social, academic, or occupational.

Persons with disabilities could experience repeated rejections, harrasements, and all types of abuse (physical, emotional, and or sexual). They might feel stigmatized and suffer from anxiety and or depression and prefer to live in isolation either to avoid the stressful situations they are obliged to face daily or because of lack of resources that could facilitate their living and empower them to have a better quality of life.

How can we help persons with disabilities?

Early diagnosis of disabilities with implementation of early intervention programs will effectively reduce their long term sequelae on an individual's life.

On the other hand, rehabilitation is the golden standard management of persons with disabilities. It entails recognition and maximization of their abilities and supporting them to get the utmost use of their skills and gifts as well as identification of the type and severity of their handicaps and minimization of their impact on their daily life.

Creating public awareness about the needs of persons with disabilities to be understood, respected, and supported is crucial to improve their quality of life. Politicians should do their best in improving the resources available for such persons and ensuring their inclusion and equity. Professionals have to deal with them as human beings with different individual needs and not as disabilities.

This article is about the author who is one of old polio patient who owe a lot to her devoted mother and primary school teachers; without their support she would not have accomplished anything in her life. Lastly but by no means least, it is always worthy to believe that whenever there is help, there is hope.

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