

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2026

It's time to listen to those who have lived it



DR SUMAIYA KHALED

Imagine being invited to tell your story, only to discover that nobody wants your opinion when decisions are made. For millions living with mental health conditions, this is an all too familiar reality.

In Bangladesh, where conversations about mental health still carry whispers of shame, people experiencing depression, anxiety and other difficulties often struggle to be understood. Their experiences are frequently dismissed, their choices questioned and their voices missing from discussions about their own care.

This year's World Mental Health Day, observed on 10 October, challenges that silence with a powerful message: "*Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change.*"

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is urging governments, healthcare providers and communities to recognise something remarkably simple: people who have experienced mental health difficulties understand challenges that textbooks alone cannot explain.

They know what it feels like to seek help and face judgement. They understand the loneliness of being misunderstood, the fear of speaking openly and the frustration of receiving care that overlooks their needs.

Yet, being heard is not the same as being included. According to WHO's Mental Health Atlas 2024 survey, only 45 per cent of responding countries reported ongoing collaboration with people who have experienced mental health conditions and their families in planning, delivering or reviewing mental health services.



Although 80 per cent of countries with mental health policies reported consulting these individuals, meaningful involvement remains far from universal.

The gap becomes even more troubling when examining how people receive care.

Across responding countries, only nine per cent have fully moved away from relying on psychiatric institutions towards care within communities. Meanwhile, nearly half of reported psychiatric hospital admissions happen without patients' consent, and 23 per cent of hospital stays exceed one year.

Behind these figures are human lives, interrupted relationships and opportunities lost. WHO is therefore advocating a shift towards care that allows people to remain connected to their families, communities and everyday lives, supported by appropriate services rather than unnecessary isolation.

For Bangladesh, this message deserves particular attention. Mental health support should not end at hospital doors. Universities, workplaces, neighbourhoods and primary healthcare centres can help create environments where seeking support feels safe rather than shameful.

Equally important is giving people with personal experience a genuine place at the decision making table. They should help shape awareness campaigns, identify barriers to treatment and evaluate whether services actually work.

Families, too, must learn that compassion means more than offering sympathy. It means respecting choices, protecting dignity and listening without judgement.

This World Mental Health Day, perhaps the most important question is not whether we are talking enough about mental health.

It is whether we are finally allowing those who know its struggles best to lead the conversation themselves.

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Obesity: The silent epidemic weighing on our future

Obesity is no longer just about waistlines. It is a growing health crisis, silently threatening millions of lives. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in seven people worldwide lived with obesity in 2024. Bangladesh, too, faces growing concerns as unhealthy diets and inactive lifestyles become increasingly common.

Excess weight increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. In 2023, unhealthy weight contributed to approximately 3.7 million deaths globally. Children face additional challenges, including bullying, emotional distress and difficulties at school. Without action, obesity could cost the global economy $3 trillion annually by 2030.

Bangladesh faces a troubling paradox. While many families struggle to afford nutritious meals, others increasingly depend on cheap, sugary and fatty foods. Consequently, undernutrition and obesity can exist within the same communities,



creating overlapping health challenges.

The solution begins with healthier everyday habits: balanced meals, regular exercise, adequate sleep and fewer sugary drinks. Breastfeeding and healthy childhood routines also offer lasting benefits.

Yet individual choices alone cannot solve this crisis. Affordable nutritious food, accessible healthcare, safer walking spaces and responsible food marketing are equally important.

Ultimately, tackling obesity means making healthier living possible for everyone.



When pain refuses to leave, can light offer relief?

MD SAIDUR RAHMAN

For countless Bangladeshis, persistent back pain, stiff knees and aching shoulders have become unwelcome companions. From office workers spending hours at desks to older adults struggling with painful joints, everyday discomfort can gradually steal independence. But could a beam of light help ease the burden?

Laser therapy is emerging as an additional option in physiotherapy, offering a gentle approach to managing certain types of pain and injury without surgery.

Unlike the powerful lasers used in operations, this treatment uses carefully controlled light directed towards affected areas. The aim is to support the body's natural healing processes, ease discomfort and reduce swelling.

For people living with long-standing neck, shoulder or lower back pain, laser therapy may provide some relief. It is also used for painful joints, muscle strains, sprains and certain sports injuries. Some specialists use it alongside other treatments for nerve-related pain and wounds that are slow to heal.

The appeal is understandable. Sessions are generally brief, involve no cutting and usually cause little discomfort. Patients can often return to their usual activities immediately afterwards.

However, laser therapy is not a miracle cure. Research suggests that benefits vary depending on the condition, treatment approach and individual patient. While some people experience meaningful improvement, others may notice little difference. Its effectiveness for certain problems remains uncertain.

Importantly, relief from pain does not necessarily mean that an underlying injury has completely healed.

In Bangladesh, where many people delay seeking professional help until pain disrupts daily life, early assessment remains essential. A qualified physiotherapist can identify the likely cause, recommend suitable treatment and determine whether laser therapy might help.

Regular exercise, strengthening weakened muscles, improving posture and maintaining healthy movement remain central to recovery. Laser therapy, when appropriate, should complement these measures rather than replace them.

Patients should also seek properly trained professionals, as incorrect use can pose risks, particularly to the eyes.

Ultimately, the promise of laser therapy lies not in dramatic claims but in its potential to make recovery more comfortable. Sometimes, finding relief begins with understanding that no single treatment can do everything.

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Why people born in the same year may age differently

Why does one 60-year-old enjoy morning walks, family gatherings and an active life, while another struggles with diabetes, high blood pressure and frequent hospital visits? Their birth certificates may reveal the same age, but their bodies tell different stories.

In Bangladesh, where long-term illnesses increasingly affect middle-aged and older adults, this question carries particular importance.

New research published on 9 October 2026 in WashU Medicine offers a fascinating explanation: the body's natural defence system may reveal how well someone is ageing.

Researchers from Washington University School of Medicine and collaborating institutions examined millions of blood cells from more than 2,600 adults worldwide.



They discovered that the balance between two types of protective blood cells could distinguish healthier ageing from patterns linked to future illness.

Further analysis involving 50,000 people found that certain blood patterns were associated with greater risks of diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney problems and even premature death over the following decade.

The exciting possibility? Scientists are developing a simple blood test that could identify warning signs years before symptoms appear.

For Bangladesh, where early detection could prevent suffering, this discovery offers hope.

A familiar song, a gentle touch: Rethinking dementia care



DR QAZI SHAFAYETUL ISLAM

Imagine looking at your own home and feeling like a stranger. Or seeing your children but believing they are still at school. For people living with dementia, such confusion can turn ordinary days into frightening experiences.

In Bangladesh, an estimated six lakh older adults live with dementia, a condition that gradually affects memory, thinking and everyday activities. With the country's ageing population, this number could reach 20 lakh by 2050.

While medicines may ease certain symptoms, they cannot cure dementia. Yet comfort, connection and dignity can still be preserved through surprisingly simple activities.

Sometimes, the most powerful care begins without a prescription. Music, painting, gardening, gentle exercise and familiar conversations can help people with dementia feel calmer, happier and more connected to their surroundings.

A favourite childhood song may awaken comforting memories. Colouring flowers can offer an outlet for emotions when words become difficult. Holding someone's hand or sharing an affectionate hug may provide reassurance when familiar faces seem



unfamiliar.

For Bangladeshi families, these approaches need not involve expensive equipment or specialised facilities.

Consider an elderly woman who spent decades preparing meals for her family. Although she now struggles to recognise her loved ones, washing vegetables or sorting familiar kitchen items may restore a sense of purpose and belonging.

Similarly, walking around the courtyard, listening to familiar music or reminiscing about childhood can make daily life more enjoyable.

Maintaining familiar surroundings also matters. Frequently rearranging furniture may increase confusion, while a predictable routine can offer reassurance.

When someone insists that their grown-up child is still attending school, arguing may only deepen their distress. Instead, acknowledging their feelings and gently redirecting attention towards a comforting activity can help.

These approaches are not substitutes for medical care. Their effectiveness varies, and activities should always match the person's abilities, preferences and safety needs.

Even when memories disappear, the need to feel loved remains unchanged.

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