

Repository on major psychiatric disorders, CALM-Brain, launched at NIMHANS

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Dignitaries attended the launch of CALM-Brain.

Bengaluru | India's first repository of data on major psychiatric disorders, CALM-Brain, was launched here on Wednesday, marking a significant step in the country's efforts to gather and systematically document details of patients with major forms of mental illness, NIMHANS said.

Developed by neuroscientists in Bengaluru, CALM-Brain is a digital repository of data on brain structure and function from a range of psychiatric disorders, it said, in a statement.

According to the Institute, the initiative is the result of collaborative efforts of researchers at the Rohini Nilekani Centre for Brain and Mind (CBM), which is a partnership between the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) and the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) - TIFR.

It was launched by Rohini Nilekani, Chairperson of the Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, which funds CBM, at NIMHANS, in the presence of clinicians and academicians associated with the project from both the institutes.

"Clinicians and researchers aiming to study neuropsychiatric disorders can access and analyse this multi-modal dataset to better understand disease onset, progression and underlying biological changes leading to disease symptoms," NIMHANS said in the statement.

These findings have immense potential to transform the understanding of mental disorders, and in turn, provide better diagnosis and plan personalised treatments for patients, it said.

"CALM-Brain is India's first-of-its-kind repository of clinical, neuro-imaging, behavioural, genetic and other datasets on five disorders: addiction, bipolar disorder, dementia, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and schizophrenia. This longitudinal data incorporates multiple modes of studying brain function in neuropsychiatric diseases," NIMHANS said.

The Institute said that the dataset is also linked to a biorepository of stem cells, which can be used to perform biological research in psychiatry to understand the origins of such severe mental illnesses.

On the importance of CALM-Brain, Prof L S Shashidhara, Director of NCBS, said, "Large data sets being made available on both affected and unaffected individuals in a family would help us to accelerate discovery and develop more effective preventive and therapeutic interventions."

According to NIMHANS, Phase-wise patient data gathering for the CALM-Brain was initiated in 2016 by this group of researchers from NIMHANS and NCBS, as part of the Accelerator program for discovery in brain disorders using stem cells jointly funded by the Department of Biotechnology and the Pratiksha Trust.

Currently, this repository contains data of over 2,000 participants from 900 families, it said.

"Most global studies focus on individuals (not families), specific disorders (not across diagnoses), a single biological investigation (not several) and are almost entirely Europe and North America-centric (South Asia and India have remained highly under-represented). With CALM-Brain, we will be able to tackle many of these limitations," said Prof Biju Viswanath of NIMHANS.

According to estimates cited by the WHO, India's economic loss due to mental health conditions is USD 1.03 trillion (2012-2030). Further, the NIMHANS-led National Mental Health survey in 2015-2016 found that 10.6 per cent of Indian adults suffered from one or another mental illness, it added.

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