



# TIRANGA

NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY-PENNSYLVANIA (TRI-STATE) EDITION

Published from New Jersey

SEPTEMBER 2014

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YEAR:17 ISSUE#194

Community news for Indians who call New York, New Jersey & Pennsylvania home

September 2014



**Dr. Makhija being honored by Mrs. Smita Shah with Jayesh Patel and Harish Mehta**

Any mention of mental illness or mental disorders including suicide brings about a feeling of shame. This is precisely what the effort of South Asian Mental Health Initiative and Network (SAMHIN) hopes to change.

At the Central Jersey Indian Lions Club of Iselin meeting on August 20th, a presentation on a variety of issues on mental illness in South Asian community was conducted to help raise awareness. With guest speakers from SAMHIN, the audience was able to learn about depression and many important facts and statistics of suicide, and risk factors for suicide and strategies to prevent this tragedy.

Vasudev N. Makhija, MD, Founder and President of SAMHIN, addressed the questions and issues of mental illness and suicide raised by recent tragic death by suicide of Robin Williams.

Dr. Makhija also talked about the tremendous stigma not only of mental illness but also about suicide. Stigma is one of the biggest barriers to people seeking help when needed. Stigma also results in people suffering in silence after losing a loved one through suicide. He presented what SAMHIN hopes to do to overcome stigma. He explained that it is more important to be connected with one another at times of depression, and create an active dialogue instead of trying to avoid the problem.

Sai Ganagani, a youth volunteer of SAMHIN also spoke on the issue of suicide. He talked about the actions taken by SAMHIN to raise awareness about mental illness. He spoke about the searchable database that is being created to make it easy for our community members to find a suitable mental health provider. This data will be available free to anyone on the website currently being developed, [www.samhin.org](http://www.samhin.org). This will improve the access to care.

In addition, Mr. A.V. Balesham, a teacher spoke about the issue of suicide in Hyderabad, includ-

ing suicide by young children over issues of grades and homework.

During the question and answer session, there was lively and engaging discussion between Dr. Makhija and audience on a variety of mental health issues including suicide facing our community.

The meeting was concluded with the mention of the World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10. Everyone was encouraged to light a candle near a window to show support for suicide prevention, remember a lost loved one, and the survivors of suicide.

Dr. Makhija thanked the Lions Club officers for the opportunity to educate our community on mental health issues. There was discussion of future collaboration for more projects to engage and educate the community, to decrease the stigma and the resulting suffering.

SAMHIN, South Asian Mental Health Initiative and Network, a tax-exempt organization, was launched earlier this year to address a broad range of mental health needs of growing South Asian Community nationwide, beginning with New Jersey, including stigma, access to care, spiritual/pastoral care, and developing a network of mental health providers for culturally competent care.

**Sai Ganagani, a youth volunteer of SAMHIN speaking on the issue of suicide**

