

PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING AT WORKPLACE – CASE STUDY OF AN INDIAN MANUFACTURING ORGANIZATION

R. Krishnamoorthi, R. Krishnaveni and N. Sekar

Industrialized countries lose a significant portion of their wealth each year due to stress related illness. No organization will ever be free from stress among its employees. Not every individual is capable to manage the stress of present day life style. Hence organizations should be able to deal with stress on individuals at all levels and strive to develop a stress-free yet motivated and capable workforce.

Organizations today have to give utmost importance to attracting and retaining highly skilled, and quality employees. As a result some progressive organisations are offering psychological counselling services to their employees, where people can talk and attempt to solve their personal and work related concerns. Counselling has shown effectiveness over the years, as a process of helping people come through with their troubles. Organizations that care for their employees are perceived as more purposeful and hence employee counselling is a very powerful tool in the hands of companies.

This study is an attempt to understand the process and utility of psychological counselling. The information is collected from the psychological counsellor and the HR Department of the company. The study details the counselling process, types of problems faced by the employees and the management's continuous monitoring and support initiatives over a period of four years. Since the data is based on the real time experience of a large manufacturing organization, it helps the companies to understand the magnitude of the problem and immediate need for providing counselling services.

Key Words: Counselling, Organization, Counsellor, Employee, Stress

Theoretical Background

Need for Counseling

An organization's success was credited traditionally to product and process technology, access to financial markets, developing economies of scale, learning curves, patents, protected markets and individual attractiveness. However, nowadays these customary bases of success are less relevant compared to the selection and management of a quality workforce which has become more and more critical factor to organizational success.

According to the '*Staying@Work*' survey, stress is the number one lifestyle risk factor in India and the problem is only getting worse. It is important to note that this survey addressed the experiences of skilled workers in India that has enjoyed many of the benefits of India's economic growth over the past three decades.

Address for communication: **R. Krishnamoorthi**, Research Scholar, PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore, Anna University, Tamilnadu, India, *E-mail:* rkmvoc@gmail.com

The costs to organizations associated with employees' poor psychological health in the form of lost productivity resulting from stress-related inefficiency and incompetence are on the rise. Stress-related productivity losses can be avoided if properly managed. Employee counselling can do much to prevent the negative effects of stress at an individual level and ultimately at an organizational level. Organizations cannot afford to ignore the consequences associated with employees' psychological health and related stress.

Workplace counselling can achieve a reduction in work-related problems in about 50% of employees who received counselling. Analysis of the results of 128 studies of workplace counselling published between 1980 and 2005, key findings of the review suggest that in organizations that have workplace counselling programmes around 6.5 per cent of employees make direct personal use of the service each year. The vast majority that is more than 90 per cent of employees who use workplace counselling are highly satisfied with the service they received and this resulted in increased work performance. It was also noted that levels of absenteeism, drunkenness and sicknesses also fell by 25 -50 per cent which was a significant positive effects on the level of job commitment, work functioning, job satisfaction and substance misuse and also work performance was enhanced Mayors' (2006).

Different people since the beginning of mankind like parents, teachers, friends and elders have used counselling in some way or the other. It was to the family doctor that people went most frequently. Counselling is definitely one service that can help people learn to manage themselves. Today of course it is a very specialized service and a profession in itself. Pressure at work place and at home, lack of support system such as elders and the mismatch of expectations are the reasons for disharmony between couples & there is alienation.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has set up a network "Maitree" in 2005 to counsel its employees. Under the initiative, 90% of TCS offices organize family get-togethers and activities such as ball dancing and yoga classes and theatre workshop, helping employees working long hours keep healthy. At Wipro, to reduce employee stress after long working hours, HR initiated "Mitr", an in house counselling service, in 2003, the set up trains employees in counselling to help out colleagues in distress, Infosys set up 24x7 helpline in 2006 as a special initiative.

Employers are interested in the productivity and performance of their staff. They are in business to produce with tight deadlines to be met and few staff members with which to meet them. If employees are unhappy, anxious, or stressed they will not be able to perform well on their jobs. Their productivity and performance will go down. In addition, their interpersonal relations both at home and on the job may suffer more even when they ordinarily do not have interpersonal relations' issues. This creates stress and again impacts on their performance. Organisations that have people trained in counselling will be better able to handle their people issues

than those that do not. Staff who are feeling anxious, stressed, or unhappy will not be able to perform very well on the job despite their background and experience. If they have had an opportunity to talk through their problems with a trained counsellor, they will be able to be much more productive. This will save the organization time and money (Janis, 2014).

Perhaps, several factors have contributed to the growth and popularity of workplace counselling. At one level, workplace counselling can be viewed merely as an application of methods of brief, relationship-focused psychological intervention that have been shown to be effective in other settings. A distinctive strength of workplace counselling is that the client is seen by a therapist who is sensitized to the combination of personal and work pressures that the person may present. Workplace counselling is a systemic, as well as individual, intervention. The introduction of a counselling service may begin to change the way that managers and other staff think and talk about emotional difficulties and personal problems. The costs to employers of psychological disability are clearly understood (Goldberg & Steury, 2001).

Workplace counselling offers employees a facility that is confidential, easily accessed, provides a properly qualified and supervised practitioner, does not raise the threat of a diagnosis of psychiatric disorder, and promises to alleviate distress within a reasonably short period of time. Workplace counselling offers the employer a service that is valued by employees, has the potential for savings by reducing sickness absence, takes pressure off managers through the availability of a constructive means of dealing with 'difficult' staff or situations, and contributes to its reputation as a caring employer (John and Max , 2003).

Counselling

European Association for Counselling defines Counselling as “an interactive client beneficial relationship set up to approach clients’ issues. These issues can be social, cultural and or emotional and the Counsellor will approach them in a holistic way. A client can be a person, or a family group or even an institution. The overall aim of counselling is to help clients recognise opportunities to help them live in more satisfying and rewarding ways as individuals and as members of society. The Counsellor can be involved in resolving specific problems which could involve making decisions and helping a client cope when in a crisis situation. The Counsellor can help a client resolve relationship issues through helping them raise their self-awareness. To do this they will also need to work with the clients’ feelings, thoughts and perceptions and be aware of both internal and external conflicts.

Psychological counseling

Counselling and ‘Psychological Counselling’ are different from each other. Counselling in the form of advising, consoling and sharing happens in all spheres

of life and does not need a specialized counsellor. Even in organizations, this kind of Counselling usually happens at all levels. This is informal or friendly form of Counselling. Psychological Counselling is a process that emphasizes a formal relationship between the counselee and the counsellor. The focus of the relationship is achieving specific goals, that is, solving the problems as disclosed by the clients. The help is confined to specific times and days and the relationship ends when the objectives are achieved. The counsellor has specialized training and applies the principles of psychology to help clients.

Psychological Counselling can play an important role in helping the employees to have better control over their lives, take their decisions wisely, fulfil their responsibilities, reduce the level of stress and anxiety. Psychological counselling to employees can have desired outcomes for the organisation. It helps the organisation by making the employees realize that the organization cares for them, and infuse a sense of commitment with the organization. This type of counselling facilitates behaviour modification of the employees and re-enforce the desired behaviour to improve and increase the employee productivity

Types of issues which necessitate workplace counselling

Issues which necessitate workplace counselling are follows as per various counselling related websites:

Job dissatisfaction, disciplinary issues, sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying, difficulties in peer relationships, difficulties with line management, changes in work roles, redundancy-actual or threatened, work stress, bullying, harassment, depression, alcohol abuse and drug abuse, depression, anxiety, Self-esteem, anger management, abuse, bereavement and loss, couple relationships, other relationships, life events, family matters and similar issues.

Professional counselors who can stimulate personal growth in others, offer help in addressing many situations that cause emotional stress, including, but not limited to: Anxiety, depression, other mental and emotional problems and disorders, Family and relationship issues, Substance abuse and other addictions, Sexual abuse and domestic violence, Absenteeism, Career change and job stress, Social and emotional difficulties related to disability and illness, Adopting to life transitions, The death of a loved one and appropriate referrals after assessment to mention few others.

There are many situations in the workplace when counselling might be called for: Some of these problems arise outside the work place. They can be personal problems such as sexual behaviour that might pose a high risk for HIV/AIDS, or addiction to drugs or alcohol. They may be related to family issues: money problems, sickness and death in the family causing grief or trauma. They may also be issues related specifically to the work place, such as matters like career development, discipline, performance, relating to customers or clients, promotion, redeployment, transfers, redundancies, retirement, etc. There might be problems individuals have in relating to others in the work place, either as individuals or as part of a team.

Other problems may lie in relating to customers, to bosses or to those in authority in general, bosses might also have problems in relating to their juniors and similar workplace relationships.

About this Study

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To understand and record the process of psychological counselling service offered to employees of the company
- 2) To detail the practical aspects involved in the implementation and making it successful
- 3) Finally highlight the extent of utilization of this service by the employees of the company

The first objective of the study is to observe the counselling process and documenting it for the benefit of needy companies. Setting up and maintaining a counselling service in the workplace needs careful planning. Without carefully foreseen decisions on policy, procedures and implementation, problems will inevitably arise. Failures may also arise due to issues of administration, politics or lack of sufficient assessment. Thus normally failure could be traced to initial program implementation process. Hence documentation of the process from the experience of a successful organization will definitely help the companies who would like to offer this service in their workplace.

The second objective of this study is to detail the practical aspects in implementation and successful utilisation. Counselling is hard work. It takes time for preparation. Every situation is unique — each has distinct facts and different employees. Accordingly, every situation must have tailored and planned techniques and approaches to get maximum benefit from the effort expended. Company must decide ahead of time on the objectives company wish to achieve and develop a counselling plan that will help company stay on track during the counselling session. Hence the company's experiences in the implementation phase and the knowledge of steps taken by the company to create the awareness in employees and make them successfully utilize the service will be of value to the companies who have recently started the service and experience initial hiccups.

The third objective of the study is to highlight the extent to which the service is used by the employees. The employee response and utilization has to be monitored and improved with proactive initiatives to create awareness and motivation among employees about the counselling service.

Methodology

This study was carried out in a large manufacturing company based in South India. This company has several manufacturing locations and sales outlets/offices across

the country. However the counselling facility is offered at three manufacturing locations which employ around 3000 employees. This study is aimed at investigating the process of employee counselling in the organization. The design of this research study was exploratory in nature. Focus was mainly to collect information regarding procedure, extent and utility of psychological counselling service provided to employees of this company.

The primary source of data collection was formal discussions, structured interviews and scrutiny of records made available. The data collected was based on the inputs from the HR Department and the psychological counsellor. Except for the numerical details regarding the extent of employees benefitted all other findings are mostly qualitative in nature explaining the process and other practical aspects. Records made available to the researcher have been made use of to the extent of recording and verification of numbers and facts. Overall this study is done to highlight the necessity of psychological counselling service at workplace and also to document the process so that it is useful for other companies who intend to follow.

Major Findings of this Study

- 1) What is Psychological counselling according to the company
Psychological Counselling is a process which aims at helping individuals in solving problems that are already present, preventing the occurrence of problems in future, enhancing personal, social, emotional, educational and vocational development. Thus counselling focuses on remedial, preventive and development aspects
- 2) Need for Counselling according to the company
Ventilation of problems, confidential atmosphere for discussion, empathetical approach, proven solution, facilitation to manage problems on their own, providing a matured perspective, approach free of gender or any other bias, assistance for all issues, for all ages/gender/profession, for betterment, promoting team work and logical thinking.
- 3) Company specific counseling needs
Counseling is essential for employees, since they are vulnerable. Most of the employees are in mid-age and prone to mid age crisis. Absenteeism, alcoholism, gambling, lavishness, lethargy and extra- marital affairs are some of the threats. Employees badly need a moral support and guidance. Life skills training to be given, apart from technical skills and soft skills training, as a preventive measure.
- 4) Number of individuals counselled in last four years

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS COUNSELLED IN LAST FOUR YEARS

<i>Year</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Families</i>
2010	120	69
2011	110	68
2012	143	103
2013	227	110
Total	600	350

(Includes employees and their family members as per requirement)

5) Number of employees counselled gender-wise

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES COUNSELLED GENDER-WISE

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
2010	73	47	120
2011	104	6	110
2012	85	58	143
2013	184	43	227
Total	446	154	600

6) Number of employees counselled designation-wise

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES COUNSELLED DESIGNATION-WISE

<i>Year</i>	<i>Apprentices</i>	<i>Contract workers</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>Executives & above</i>
2010	3	1	88	24
2011	2	1	105	115
2012	6	39	205	113
2013	3	41	285	269

7) Common bottlenecks in availing the counselling services:

Employees not aware of counselling service

Belief that counselling is only for mentally retarded people

Hesitant to use this facility due to other's negative comments

8) Practical problems faced by the company

Time conflict among three different units due to limited availability

More focus on academic and career guidance for employee's children

Some employees hesitant to avail facility within the company premises and prefer to contact outside

Lack of awareness among employees' spouses and family members

9) Kind of problems addressed by the company so far

TABLE 4: KIND OF PROBLEMS ADDRESSED BY THE COMPANY SO FAR

<i>Type of Problem</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
Career guidance	300
Behavioural	198
Family related	111
Psychological	102
Conflict with husband	98
Conflict with wife	87
Stress and depression	79
Improvement of Academic Performance	74
Husband and wife conflict	42
Financial guidance	32
Infatuation	31
Legal guidance	31
Work Life Balance	28
Teenage distraction	25
Post marital conflict	22

10) Infra-structure available for psychological counselling

The psychological employee counseling service started four years ago is right now offered at three manufacturing locations. A well-qualified, trained and experienced psychological counsellor is available to employees once in a week at each of the manufacturing locations at designated place and time. The timing is decided so that it is convenient to employees of all three shifts. Referral of clients by Union and Management happens apart from voluntary approach of employees.

A separate office room is provided to the counsellor within the company premises and is placed so that convenience and confidentiality is assured for employees. The counselors' office is provided with sound proof facility and equipped with laptop, computer, printer with scanner and UPS. Counselling awareness posters are exhibited at all departments and awareness program conducted covering all employees. Counsellor periodically visits the factory. Sign language translator / training facility is provided for the benefit of physically challenged employees.

Employees' feedback mechanism to understand the impact of counselling and review meeting with counsellor are done by management as part of periodical monitoring and support. This is apart from regular MIS reports by counsellor to top management.

11) Steps In Counselling Process:

1. Client approaching the counsellor (Voluntarily or through referral)
2. Making the client understand and accept the process of counselling
3. Listening to patient's feelings/problem

4. Analysis of problem
 5. Providing various alternatives/solutions
 6. Facilitating client to make decisions
 7. Executing the decision taken
 8. Follow up counselling
 9. Further analysis/support as per requirement
 10. End of the counselling process
12. Counselling Mode
- One to one interaction (Counsellor and the client)
 - Making the client speak
 - Make the client read relevant books
 - Make the client listen/view audio/video clips
13. Expectation from the client
- 100% openness
 - Patience
 - Trust
 - Prompt Action
14. Extra initiatives to create awareness on counselling facility
- To create awareness among employees to avail counseling facility, training and mentoring programs are conducted by the company covering the following important topics: Career guidance, Students' Motivation, Effective home management for Spouses of employees, Stress management for women Contract labourers, Key to Happiness program for employees, Specific programs for Deaf & Dumb employees, Personal happiness, Work life balance, Role management, Art of parenting, Conflict with spouse, Mid age crisis, Problem solving, Counselling process, Benefits of counselling and Counsellor availability
- Further programs planned: Finance management for all employees, Cookery training for male employees, training to inculcate new hobbies like: gardening, music, public speaking and similar ones based on employee interest, awareness and support to employees to involve in community and social development related activities
- 14) **Details of few sample cases successfully resolved by the counsellor**
- As a depiction of the mode in which the client comes to the counsellor and how the problems are resolved, five real cases are detailed below:
- CASE STUDY ONE

The client is a female employee aged 35 years. She was unable to control her ill feelings towards the act of washing clothes on her own very often.

Her negative emotions due to this were easily noticeable by others.

When she approached the counsellor, he found her suffering from psychological disorder and referred her to a specialist doctor. After undergoing six months of medication and counselling support she recovered fully.

CASE STUDY TWO

The client is a group manager in corporate office. He was mentally affected, due to his daughter's love affair.

Since he was highly emotional, he could not make any decisions.

The counsellor provided various alternatives to resolve the problem, and hence the client chose the most suitable solution for him. After execution of the chosen solution, he became normal.

CASE STUDY THREE

The client is a wife of having a female child of 9 years old. Abandoning his wife and daughter, the employee eloped with his sister-in-law. Though the police traced the eloped pair and warned them severely, the husband was not willing to live with his wife.

Hence being a hopeless home maker the wife was totally depressed and tried to commit suicide.

The counsellor eliminated her suicide mood and motivated her to fight against the problem. He counselled her to study B.Ed. degree and work as a teacher in a private school. After executing the various strategies offered by the counsellor, she has now retrieved her husband and leading normal life.

CASE STUDY FOUR

The client was an Engineering graduate trainee in Titan. His probationary period was extended twice, due to his behavioural problems.

The HOD was dissatisfied with his behaviour and sent him to counsellor through HR Department.

After 5 sittings with the counsellor, the trainee's behaviour has drastically changed. He has been absorbed as an engineer by the company.

CASE STUDY FIVE

The client is a son of a woman employee. He was addicted to many bad habits while studying post-graduation in a reputed college. As a resultant, he was dismissed from the college.

The employee's family was depressed totally and the employee tried to commit suicide.

After meeting the counsellor, the boy has fully recovered from his bad habits. He joined his P.G. in another reputed college and the entire family has been saved.

Discussion

This study was done in a large manufacturing company which can represent the manufacturing sector and where counselling service is running successfully for the past five years. The employees are affected by personality and behavioural issues. While some employees are able to manage with it, in most cases such issues influenced their work performance negatively. Employees should be counselled on issues that become a concern to the organization. If the matter becomes a concern it needs to be shared with the person who caused the concern. It will never be resolved if it is kept unattended. Employees should be counselled on any issue that becomes a concern to the individual and the organization.

The situation is common across all types of organizations and in a large labour force the employee suffering goes unseen. If not managed properly and in time this can lead to big problems and organization has to pay heavy price for it.

Counselling will not correct every situation. Some cases will progress to disciplinary action or a performance-improvement period before company get the employee's attention. Counselling takes time and patience. Change should be the primary objective of each counselling session. If change is not the primary objective of the session, there is no reason to counsel. If the desired change is not achieved, the documentation prepared at the end of the session can be used to support a future personnel action and it will show that company attempted to help the employee improve before initiating a formal corrective action.

The experience of this company shows that employees have responded to the management's initiative and are utilizing the counselling service. The number of employees counselled is slowly on the rise as evident from the available data. There is no gender wise disparity. The family members of employees have also started utilizing the service.

The employees who come for counselling are both on voluntary and referral terms. While most of them come on their own, some of them are referred by either union or management. Referrals include disciplinary cases, those who need behavioural/attitude modification and also new joiners. The employees counselled are affected by both personal and work related problems. The problems vary from person to person and include all type of problems associated with modern day life style which is stress oriented. Most problems come from relationships whether it is at home or at work. Majority of them are solved through the trained psychological counsellor's timely support.

Apart from providing a trained counsellor and required infrastructure, HR and top management of the company are monitoring the process daily from all angles

and taking required action. There is a proper feedback mechanism involving employees, counsellor and the management which ensures proper communication and information to take correction wherever necessary. Based on the information gained through various sources, management not only takes corrective action and provides required support, it also plans training programs to improve awareness and utilization of counselling service among employees.

Thus counselling service is serving the interests of both the management and the employees. For employees it is providing a reliable mechanism where they can discuss their problems, get expert support and solve the problems in a confidential atmosphere. For the employer, apart from being a useful employee welfare tool, counselling process aids in ensuring a proper workplace atmosphere and avoid productivity losses. Thereby the counselling service helps the company in overall achievement of the objectives. This is achieved with good planning and minimum investment of resources, which is nothing when compared to the quantum of benefits that comes back from the counselling service.

Practical Implications

This study is an attempt to observe the psychological counselling service to employees at work place, record the process and highlight the practical aspects so that it can serve as a guide for other companies who want to follow and take advantage. Apart from giving a detailed account of the process and its utility, the study also highlights the practical aspects in planning, implementing and monitoring the counselling process to make it more effective. Since the study is based on the real life experiences of a company which has implemented the service and running it successfully for the past four years, it can be followed by similar companies. The findings of the study are in line with the earlier findings in similar context and also provide additional knowledge in the subject. The findings show the extent to which present day workforce is affected by stress and the various kinds of problems associated with modern stress oriented life styles. It also highlights various problems associated with modern day relationships both at home and work place and how individuals are failing to achieve the balance between work and life. The kind of problems encountered by the companies range from conflicts with family and colleagues, financial problems, behavioural problems, attitudinal problems and a host of other problems commonly reported in today's society. The study also shows how companies can cope with the situation by providing counselling service in time help employees to overcome the situation. By investing a little time and resources, companies can take advantage of counselling service to provide valuable and timely help to employees in overcoming their problems, which otherwise will lead to chaos both in their personal and work lives. The company apart from improving its image as employee care taker can also address productivity and quality related issues at work place. It also helps in enhancing a supportive and peaceful work atmosphere.

The company's proper planning and implementation in providing a well-equipped counselling facility within the company's premises but without sacrificing on the confidentiality and convenience of the employee has played a great role in the success of the counselling service. The facility has made use of the latest technology and tools to make the service better approachable and affordable to employees.

Various initiatives by management to improve awareness in employees about the counselling service have also resulted in motivating more employees and their families to voluntarily approach the counsellor and take advantage of the facility whenever needed. Specific training programs to employees on issues like: counselling facility offered, parenting, mid-age crisis, time management, stress management, personal happiness, work-life balance, legal issues, financial planning have helped the company to make the counselling service more effective and widely used. The company has conducted specific sessions by experts on academic and career guidance for children of employees along with parents, which has saved a lot of counsellor's time for regular workplace availability.

Based on the successful functioning of counselling process in this company, three other companies in the vicinity have approached the psychological counsellor of this company and his team for initiation of workplace counselling service in their respective companies. With the experience gained in this company, the counsellor and his team were able to plan and implement the counselling service successfully in these three companies also. Thus the real time experience of this company in planning and implementation of employee counselling service in a dedicated way has induced several other companies to use the experience for implementation in their respective companies. Hence the findings of this study can be used by companies who plan to offer counselling service to their employees. It will also be useful for psychological counsellors to fine tune their skills and approach in line with the latest trends. It can also be used by HR professionals and top management to understand the impact of stress related problems on their workforce and offer required support in the form of counselling.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The issue dealt with in this study is confidential and delicate in nature as it is associated with emotional and personal matters of employees. Hence the process of data collection was very difficult and verification of the facts was limited to records made available by the HR Department. The persons benefitted by the counselling process could not be contacted due to the confidential nature of the counselling process. The researcher could not analyse the problems on his own in detail linking stress to variables like family background of the counselled, previous medical history, relationships at workplace, post counselling change and similar ones. Most of the data collected is depending on the inputs from the counsellor

and HR department, although verified with available records. Due to the limitations of time, other resources and also the availability of a large company with successful track record of counselling service, the study is done in one company only.

Future studies can be conducted by collecting information from several companies and analysed on a comparative mode. This study mainly focussed on documenting the process and other practical aspects so that it can be used by the needy organizations and practitioners. Future studies can analyse impact of demographics on stress to the extent of data available.

Studies can also be done on the need for psychological counselling and its usefulness involving various sections of work force. Further research on counselling can be done in other sectors like service which may have varied impact of stress on its employees.

Conclusion

This study reinforces the need for workplace counselling by highlighting the magnitude of stress related problems in work place and the extent to which it affects the workers effectiveness at work and thereby productivity. The findings also suggest that by providing a counselling service with trained counsellor and right environment, the management can solve most of the stress related problems. The workers also respond to the management's initiative and utilize the counselling service to solve their problems if offered in a right manner. The study also showed how management by regular monitoring and taking corrective if not proactive steps can improve the awareness among employees and make more people utilize the counselling service in a better manner. The study by detailing the planning, implementation, monitoring and correction activities of the company has documented a model for companies who intend to set up counselling service in similar contexts. Since the findings are based on the experiences of an organization which is successfully offering the counselling service for the past five years, organizations, researchers and practioners can use the information according to their requirements.

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