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MedicalAwareness Literature For Doctor & Patient

KPC MINDTRACK

STRESS

EDITED AND COMPILED BY Dr. VIMAL KUMAR

Dear Friends,

Ever feel that your stress is making you sick, and you have little control over that sad fact?

Plenty of research has shown a link between psychological stress and subsequent illness- we experience greater stress when facing illness, to be sure, but there's also a direct link between experiencing stress and experiencing compromised health.

However, we also know that not everyone experiences stress the same, and the same level of stress can impact people differently (based on their personality, the way they view and respond to their stressors, and other factors).

Now recent research shows that the level of control we feel (our locus of control), and how capable we feel ourselves to be (our level of self-efficacy) can alter the degree to which stress impacts our health.

I have tried to select some useful topics related to stress and hope that you will find **KPC MINDTRACK** a useful new letter, your feed back will definitely help us to provide more useful in future issues.

WISHING YOU ALL THE BEST &
HAPPY READING

DR.VIMAL KUMAR
For further information kindly visits us at
Our website- www.delhipsychiatrist.com or
E-mail to dr.vimalkumar@yahoo.com

DISCLAIMER

When stress enhances performance in a positive way, it's called eustress. But if the stress is fueled by an inability to cope with a situation, it's named distress. Distress is characterized by its negative effects on the body and mind, especially in the long-term. Over time, if distress is not regulated, it can be a breeding ground for illness and disease.

While anxiety and stress have a tendency to be synonymous nowadays, anxiety is simply an effect of stress. Anxiety, depression, and withdrawal are other common effects of distress, and they form part of a cycle that becomes hard to break. Distress is probably the most detrimental type of stress for your health. This is the kind that will lower your immune response, worsen pain, and make you more prone to heart disease. Managing distress is fundamental for a healthy, balanced lifestyle. If the sources of distress are not evaluated and a strategy to address it isn't planned, then the case will most likely result in bodily manifestations such as headaches, chest pains, hair loss, appetite changes, and so on.

Keeping track of your finances, sustaining a healthy communication level at home, fulfilling your work duties in time - these are all things that you can do to avoid distress. Since life has the ability to surprise us constantly, both with good and bad situations, it's wise to manage the stressful aspects that you can actually control. Facing stress isn't easy, but by developing a strategy, it can be minimized to harmless levels. If you reduce the sources of distress in your life, you are likely to be more productive, active, and happier altogether.

What Is Stress

Stress is simply a fact of nature - forces from the outside world affecting the individual. The individual responds to stress in ways that affect the individual as well as their environment. Hence, all living creatures are in a constant interchange with their surroundings (the ecosystem), both physically and behaviourally. However, there are critical differences in how different living creatures relate to their environment. These differences have far-reaching consequences for survival. Because of the overabundance of stress in our modern lives, we usually think of stress as a negative experience, but from a biological point of view, stress can be a neutral, negative, or positive experience.

In general, stress is related to both external and internal factors. External factors include the physical environment, including your job, your relationships with others, your home, and all the situations, challenges, difficulties, and expectations you're confronted with on a daily basis. Internal factors determine your body's ability to respond to, and deal with, the external stress-inducing factors. Internal factors which influence your ability to handle stress include your nutritional status, overall health and fitness levels, emotional well-being, and the amount of sleep and rest you get.

Stress has driven evolutionary change (the development and natural selection of species over time). Man is the most adaptive creature on the planet because of the evolution of the human brain, especially the part called the neo-cortex. This adaptability is largely due to the changes and stressors that we have faced and mastered. Therefore, we, unlike other animals, can live in any climate or ecosystem, at various altitudes, and avoid the danger of predators. Moreover, most recently, we have learned to live in the air, under the sea, and even in space, where no living creatures that we know of have ever survived. So then, what is so bad about stress?

A brief history of stress

A key to the understanding of the negative aspects of stress is the concept of *milieu interieur* (the internal environment of the body), which was first advanced by the great French physiologist Claude Bernard. In this concept, he described the principles of dynamic equilibrium. In dynamic equilibrium, constancy, a steady state (situation) in the internal bodily environment, is essential to survival. Therefore, external changes in the environment or external forces that change the internal balance must be reacted to and compensated for if the organism is to survive. Examples of such external forces include temperature, oxygen concentration in the air, the expenditure of energy, and the presence of predators. In addition, diseases were also stressors that threatened the constancy of the *milieu interieur*.

The great neurologist Walter Cannon coined the term *homeostasis* to further define the dynamic equilibrium that Bernard had described. Through his experiments, he demonstrated the "fight or flight" response that man and other animals share when threatened. Hans Selye, another early scientist who studied stress, extended Cannon's observations. He included, as part of the body's stress response system, the pituitary gland, a small gland at the base of the brain. He described the control by this gland of the secretion of hormones (for example, cortisol) that are important in the physiological response to stress by the other part of the adrenal gland known as the cortex. Additionally, Selye actually introduced the term *stress* from physics and engineering and defined it as "mutual actions of forces that take place across any section of the body, physical or psychological."

What Are The Signs And Symptoms Of Poorly Managed Stress?

Excess stress can manifest itself in a variety of emotional, behavioral, and even physical symptoms, and the symptoms of stress vary enormously among different individuals. Common somatic (physical) symptoms often reported by those experiencing excess stress include sleep disturbances, muscle tension, headache, gastrointestinal disturbances, and fatigue. Emotional and behavioral symptoms that can

accompany excess stress include nervousness, anxiety, changes in eating habits including overeating, loss of enthusiasm or energy, and mood changes. Of course, none of these signs or symptoms means for certain that there is an elevated stress level since all of these symptoms can be caused by other medical and/or psychological conditions.

The experience of stress is highly individualized. What constitutes overwhelming stress for one person may not be perceived as stress by another. Likewise, the symptoms and signs of poorly managed stress will be different for each person.

Who Is Most Vulnerable To Stress?

Stress comes in many forms and affects people of all ages and all walks of life. No external standards can be applied to predict stress levels in individuals - one need not have a traditionally stressful job to experience workplace stress, just as a parent of one child may experience more parental stress than a parent of several children. The degree of stress in our lives is highly dependent upon individual factors such as our physical health, the quality of our interpersonal relationships, the number of commitments and responsibilities we carry, the degree of others' dependence upon us, expectations of us, the amount of support we receive from others, and the number of changes or traumatic events that have recently occurred in our lives.

Some generalizations, however, can be made. People with adequate social support networks report less stress and overall improved mental health in comparison to those without adequate social contacts. People who are poorly nourished, who get inadequate sleep, or who are physically unwell also have a reduced capacity to handle pressures and stresses of everyday life and may report higher stress levels. Some stressors are particularly associated with certain age groups or life stages. Children, teens, working parents, and seniors are examples of the groups who often face common stressors related to life transitions.

Teen Stress

As one example of stress related to a life transition, the teen years often bring about an increase in perceived stress as young adults learn to cope with increasing demands and pressures. Studies have shown that excessive stress during the teen years can have a negative impact upon both physical and mental health later in life. For example, teen stress is a risk factor for the development of depression, a serious condition that carries an increased risk of suicide. Fortunately, effective stress-management strategies can diminish the ill effects of stress. Recognition of the problem and helping teens to develop stress-management skills can also be valuable preventive measures.

What Is The Healthy Response To Stress?

A key aspect of a healthy adaptational response to stress is the time course. Responses must be initiated rapidly, maintained for a proper amount of time, and then turned off to ensure an optimal result. An over-response to stress or the failure to shut off a stress response can have negative biological consequences for an individual. Healthy human responses to stress involve three components:

- 1. The brain handles (mediates) the immediate response. This response signals the adrenal medulla to release epinephrine and norepinephrine.
- 2. The hypothalamus and the pituitary gland initiate the slower maintenance response by signaling the adrenal cortex to release cortisol and other hormones.
- 3. Many neural circuits are involved in the behavioral response. This response increases arousal ,focuses attention, inhibits feeding and reproductive behavior, reduces pain perception, and redirects behavior.

The combined results of these three components of the stress response maintain the internal balance (homeostasis) and optimize energy production and and utilization. They also gear up the organism for a quick reaction through the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). The SNS operates by increasing the heart rate, increasing blood pressure, redirecting blood flow to the heart, muscles, and brain and away from the gastrointestinal tract, and releasing fuel (glucose and fatty acids) to help fight or flee the danger.

How Does The Response To Stress Work?

While the complete story is not fully known, scientists understand much about how the response to stress works. The two main systems involved are the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the SNS. Triggered (activated) primarily by an area in the brain stem called the locus coeruleus, the SNS secretes epinephrine and norepinephrine. The five most important concepts to remember about these two systems are that

- 1. they are governed by a feedback loop to regulate their response (In a feedback loop, increased amounts of a substance - for example, a hormone- inhibit the release of more of that substance, while decreased amounts of the substance stimulate the release of more of that substance).
- 2. they interact with each other.
- 3. they influence other brain systems and functions.
- 4. genetic (inherited) variability affects the responses of both systems.
- 5. prolonged or overwhelming responses of these systems can be harmful to an individual.

What is the role of the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis in stress?

The HPA axis is a grouping of responses to stress by the brain and the pituitary and adrenal glands. First, the hypothalamus (a central part of the brain) releases a compound called corticotrophin releasing factor (CRF), which was discovered in 1981. The CRF then travels to the pituitary gland, where it triggers the release of a hormone, adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH).

ACTH is released into the bloodstream and causes the cortex of the adrenal gland to release the stress hormones, particularly cortisol, which is a corticosteroid hormone. Cortisol increases the availability of the body's fuel supply (carbohydrate, fat, and glucose), which is needed to respond to stress. However, if cortisol levels remain elevated for too long, then muscle breaks down, there is a decreased inflammatory response, and suppression of the immune system occurs.

Because they suppress the immune system, corticosteroids in measured doses are used to treat many illnesses that are characterized by inflammation or an overactive immune system, such as asthma and inflammatory bowel disease. For the same reason, they are used to help reduce the chances that our body will immunologically reject a transplanted organ. Corticosteroids also can cause fluid retention and high blood pressure. Therefore, it is critical that the response to corticosteroids be carefully controlled (modulated). This control usually is accomplished by a feedback mechanism in which increased cortisol levels feeding back to the hypothalamus and pituitary turn off production of ACTH.

What is the role of the locus coeruleus in stress?

The locus coeruleus has many connections to other parts of the brain, particularly areas that bring in and process sensory information (information from sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). The locus coeruleus secretes norepinephrine and stimulates other brain centers to do the same. It is like the pacemaker (meaning it controls the tempo) of the brain. Thus, it increases arousal (heightened awareness, alertness) and vigilance (watchfulness, carefulness), and adjusts (modulates) the action of the autonomic nervous system, which includes the SNS. The autonomic nervous system regulates blood flow, heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing (respiration). It can also temporarily shut down the gastrointestinal (GI) and sexual systems until the crisis is over. These initial reactions, to get our blood flowing, heart pumping, and muscles energized, occur very quickly and automatically.

How do the connections in the brain work in stress?

The HPA axis and the locus coeruleus systems are linked through the hypothalamus and an area of the brain known as the limbic system. The limbic system is the control area for emotion and the processing area for memory. These linkages are critical. For example, if you see the bushes rustling, your locus coeruleus immediately starts things (the stress response) rolling. However, when you see that it is not a mountain lion but a golden retriever in the bushes, your memory of the tameness of the dog will turn off the stress response. Similarly, if a person is nervous before a public speaking engagement and the first minute or two goes well, this happy feeling will turn down the activity of the locus coeruleus. These internal adjustments are why experienced public speakers often start off with a joke. It's as much to calm themselves (if the joke goes well) as it is to entertain you.

The connections also include the endogenous (within the body) opiate (opium-like) system and the reward (dopamine) system. Thereby, during stress, pain is reduced and an extremely happy feeling (euphoria) may result. These connections partially account for "runner's high" and have a great deal to do with why we like roller coasters and scary movies.

Here's how the connections work. The limbic system performs an emotional analysis and memory review of the information provided by the senses. Then, the multiplicity of connections allows us to determine whether the current stress is

- 1. one that has been mastered in the past and successfully adapted to,
- 2. not a threat at all, or
- 3. a clear and present danger.

All of this internal activity must occur in milliseconds, and it does.

What do we know about using (activating) and overusing our internal systems that respond to stress?

Animal and human research has taught us much about our internal stress systems. Researchers also noticed that stress of long duration (chronic stress) sensitizes the stress system (makes it more responsive to stress). That is, the system then over responds to new stressors. They further noticed that the administration of certain drugs, such as amphetamines or cocaine, could also sensitize the stress response.

Early separation from the mother has also been seen as another potent stressor in animals. Studies in humans are underway to evaluate how maternal stress, even early in the pregnancy, can affect the developing fetus.

Why might maternal stress affect the fetus? The answer is the communication of the blood circulations of the mother and the fetus. From the mother's blood, the fetus gets both the good (for example, nutrients and oxygen) and the bad. The bad components of the blood can include alcohol, nicotine, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, and stress chemicals such as cortisol and norepinephrine.

These animal and human studies seem to indicate that stress leads to depression. In other words, chronic stress in the mother's womb (in utero) or early deprivation (separation from the mother) might even predispose a person to developing the psychiatric syndrome of clinical depression in later life. Furthermore, other experiments show that the administration of stress hormones can actually decrease brain connections and even the number of brain cells in crucial areas, such as the limbic system. This loss of brain connections and cells then can lead to further maladaptive responses to stress.

What's more, some particular kinds of stress seem to be even more detrimental than other types. That is, some types of stress can actually lead to diseases. For example, stresses that are unpredictable and uncontrollable seem to be the greatest culprits. On the other hand, stresses with which we can cope and master are not necessarily bad. In fact, we can learn from these stresses, predict their recurrence, and develop action plans to reduce or avoid them in the future. In this way, some stresses can actually trigger new personality growth and biologically induced adaptive changes. Indeed, much of psychotherapy is empirically (guided by practical experience rather than theory) based upon this concept.

How Can We Manage Stress?

If we think about the causes of stress, the nature of the stress response, and the negative effects of some types of stress (prolonged, unexpected, or unmanageable stress), several healthy management strategies become clear. A first step in stress management is exercise. Since the stress response prepares us to fight or flee, our bodies are primed for action. Unfortunately, however, we usually handle our stresses while sitting at our desk, standing at the watercooler, or behind the wheel stuck in traffic. Exercise on a regular basis helps to turn down the production of stress hormones and associated neurochemicals. Thus, exercise can help avoid the damage to our health that prolonged stress can cause. In fact, studies have found that exercise is a potent antidepressant, anxiolytic (combats anxiety), and sleeping aid for many people.

For centuries in Eastern religious traditions, the benefits of meditation and other relaxation techniques have been well known. Now, Western medicine and psychology have rediscovered that particular wisdom, translated it into simple nonspiritual methods and scientifically verified its effectiveness. Thus, one or two 20-30 minute meditation sessions a day can have lasting beneficial effects on health. Indeed, advanced meditators can even significantly control their blood pressure and heart rate as well.

Elimination of drug use and no more than moderate alcohol use are important for the successful management of stress. We know that people, when stressed, seek these outlets, but we also know that many of these substances sensitize (make even more responsive) the stress response. As a result, small problems produce big surges of stress chemicals. What's more, these attempts with drugs and alcohol to mask stress often prevent the person from facing the problem directly. Consequently, they are not able to develop effective ways to cope with or eliminate the stress.

In fact, even prescription drugs for anxiety, such as diazepam, lorazepam, or alprazolam can be counterproductive in the same way. Therefore, these medications should only be used cautiously under the strict guidance of a physician. If, however, stress produces a full-blown psychiatric problem, like posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), clinical depression, or anxiety disorders, then psychotropic medications, particularly the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), are extremely useful.

We know that chronic or uninterrupted stress is very harmful. It is important, therefore, to take breaks and decompress. Take a lunch break and don't talk about work. Take a walk instead of a coffee break. Use weekends to relax, and don't schedule so many events that Monday morning will seem like a relief. Learn your stress signals. Take regular vacations or even long weekends or mental-health days at intervals that you have learned are right for you.

Create predictability in your work and home life as much as possible. Structure and routine in your life can't prevent the unexpected from happening. However, they can provide a comfortable framework from which to respond to the unexpected.

For those who may need help dealing with stress, stress-management counseling in the form of individual or group therapy is offered by various mental-health-care providers. Stress counseling and group discussion therapy have proven to reduce stress symptoms and improve overall health and attitude.

What's in the future for stress?

Stress is part of life and will always be around. The keys to dealing with stress are appropriate control of stressors and management of our physical (physiological) and mental (Psychological) responses. In this regard, some exciting Work is being done on early treatment (intervention) during extremely stressful events (such as 9-11). This intervention, called critical incident stress debriefing (CISD), involves discussing the traumatic event as soon as possible after the event. In fact, CISD can lessen extreme (pathological) reactions to stress and often prevent PTSD in its worst forms. Hopefully, the concepts of CISD can be translated into helpful strategies for managing the more common types of stress.

Stress At A Glance

- Stress is a normal part of life that can either help us learn and grow or can cause us significant problems.
- Stress releases powerful neurochemicals and hormones that prepare us for action (to fight or flee).
- If we don't take action, the stress response can create or worsen health problems.
- Prolonged, uninterrupted, unexpected, and unmanageable stresses are the most damaging types of stress.
- Stress can be managed by regular exercise, meditation or other relaxation techniques, structured timeouts, and learning new coping strategies to create predictability in our lives.
- Many behaviors that increase in times of stress and maladaptive ways of coping with stress - drugs, pain medicines, alcohol, smoking, and eating - actually worsen the stress and can make us more reactive (sensitive) to further stress.

✎While there are promising treatments for stress, the management of stress is mostly dependent on the willingness of a person to make the changes necessary for a healthy lifestyle.

Broken Heart Syndrome

The end of a relationship, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one-all can break your heart. Really. Scientists now have an ear-catching name for a heart in the grip of emotional distress: Broken Heart Syndrome (BHS).

It's a temporary heart condition brought on by stressful situations which mimics a heart attack but with little or no sign of deterioration of the heart and arteries, cholesterol build-up, diabetes, alcoholism, embolism etc.

In BHS, a part of your heart temporarily enlarges because of a surge in stress hormones-a condition called cardiomyopathy.

New Research

A 2010 article in European Heart Journal identifies for the first time the physio-pathological mechanism of the disease. The researchers contend that while BHS is not as common as a typical heart attack, it possibly occurs more frequently than doctors realise. They expect the numbers to increase as more physicians learn to recognise the syndrome's unique features.

WOMEN'S WOES

BHS affects mostly women in the post-menopause period, when they are no longer protected by their estrogen hormones.

Mimicking a Heart Attack

Sudden emotional stress can result in symptoms that mimic a classic heart attack. Acute pain in the chest and shortness of breath exactly like in a heart attack. ECG also shows clinical changes seen typically in a heart attack. But ECG also reveals that the tip of the heart chamber bulges in BHS, unlike in a heart attack. Angiogram and MRI scans show no blockages and irreversible muscle damage.

A Stunned Heart

In BHS, stress hormones temporarily 'stun' the heart. Researchers say that some people respond to sudden, overwhelming emotional stress by releasing large amounts of catecholamines (epinephrine and norepinephrine) into the bloodstream, along with their breakdown products and small proteins produced by an excited nervous system.

These chemicals can be temporarily toxic to the heart, effectively stunning the muscle and producing symptoms similar to a typical heart attack. 99% of those who get Broken Heart Syndrome are likely to survive.

"There is a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in something, you do it only when it's convenient. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results. "

Never argue with idiots because they first bring you to their level and then they beat you with their experience!!!!!!!!!!

Chronic stress refers to a continuous state of distress, which our ANS (autonomic nervous system) then ignores and fails to trigger a relaxation response. Chronic stress feels like an endless state of distress in which people are affected by overwhelming situations repeatedly.

Possible examples of chronic stress include a bad marriage, a demanding job, or the on-going illness of a relative. While we have been 'designed' to endure stress, distress, and acute stress to admirable levels, chronic stress is the most detrimental type and will certainly manifest itself through our bodies if not regulated.

Adrenaline grants us with A "super power" to subsist through threatening times. But if levels are too high for too long, the effect is counterproductive and can cause serious health risks.

Since we are not meant to endure chronic stress, the toll that an adrenaline burst can have on your body is devastating. Continuous feelings of distress contribute to 80 percent of illnesses that doctors treat every day.

Because of the potential damage of chronic stress, it's beneficial to familiarize ourselves with stress management practices. Don't wait for stress to become a problem to address it. Don't sit around waiting for a burnout, because it will happen.

Accepting how stress is affecting your life is the best way to take care of it. It's important to understand how your actions and reactions, decisions, and satisfactions are controlled by the stressfulness of any situation.

To reduce chronic stress, identify where pressures are coming from and decide whether the stress is perceived or actual. Isolate each issue and find a way to make it better. If you can't make it better, why worry? Accept it and move on.

Stress management is a highly individual practice, and each person must choose the stress control techniques that work best for them. However, stress control methods most often include a combination of exercise, relaxation techniques (deep breathing or meditation exercises), adhering to a regular sleep cycle, and proper nutrition. Exercise releases endorphins, which are the body's natural stress-fighting hormones, so any type of physical exercise is a good stress control measure. In terms of relaxation techniques, there are literally hundreds of relaxation and meditation programs that you can learn on your own or under the guidance of a teacher or practitioner.

Things To Remember

☞ Love is grand; divorce is at least a hundred grand.

☞ Time may be a great healer, but it's also a lousy beautician.

- ☞ Remember: amateurs built the ark, professionals built the Titanic.
- ☞ Talk is cheap because supply exceeds demand.
- ☞ Conscience is what hurts when everything else feels so good.
- ☞ An optimist thinks that this is the best possible world. A pessimist fears that this is true.
- ☞ Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just stand there.
- ☞ My inferiority complex is not as good as yours is.
- ☞ I'm having an out of money experience.
- ☞ It's frustrating when you know all the answers, but nobody bothers to ask you the questions.
- ☞ You're getting old when you get the same sensation from a rocking chair that you once got from a roller coaster.
- ☞ Brain cells come and brain cells go, but fat cells live forever.

Great Truths About Growing Old:

- ✦ Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.
- ✦ Insanity is my only means of relaxation.
- ✦ Forget the health food. I need all the preservatives I can get.
- ✦ You're getting old when you get the same sensation from a rocking chair that you once got from a roller coaster.
- ✦ One of life's mysteries is how a two pound box of candy can make a person gain five pounds.
- ✦ God put me on earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I am so far behind, I will live forever.
- ✦ I finally got my head together, and my body fell apart.
- ✦ There cannot be a crisis this week; my schedule is already full.
- ✦ Just when I was getting used to yesterday, along came today.
- ✦ Sometimes I think I understand everything, then I regain consciousness.
- ✦ Seen it all, done it all, can't remember most of it.

MONEY

- ✎ It can buy a House, But not a Home
- ✎ It can buy a Bed, But not Sleep
- ✎ It can buy a Clock, But not Time
- ✎ It can buy you a Book, But not Knowledge
- ✎ It can buy you a Position, But not Respect
- ✎ It can buy you Medicine, But not Health
- ✎ It can buy you Blood, But not Life
- ✎ It can buy you Sex, But not Love

So you see money isn't everything. And it often causes pain and suffering.
I tell you all this because I am your Friend, and as your Friend I want to take away your pain and suffering...So send me all your money and I will suffer for you.

I ACCEPT CASH, MONEY ORDERS, PERSONAL CHECKS AND CREDIT CARDS (MASTERCARD, VISA, SWITCH).

Sad Medical Commentary

Further proof that the long term implications of drugs / procedures must be fully considered.

Premise: Over the past few years, more money has been spent on breast implants and Viagra than on Alzheimer's.

Conclusion: In a few years, we will have a lot of people running around with huge breasts and erections who cannot remember what to do with them.

Published by:
DR. VIMAL KUMAR, MBBS MD (Psychiatry)
KOCHHAR PSYCHIATRY CENTRE
ED-7B, PITAMPURA, DELHI-110088.
TEL : 91-11-27314488, 27314489
FAX : 91-11-27314488
For further information kindly visits us at our website- www.delhipsychiatrist.com or write to E-mail to dr.vimalkumar@yahoo.com

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For details contact Dr. Varuna / Poonam / Ravi
Tel:-01127314488, 01127314489, Mob: 91-9810047186
Email: kpceducation@gmail.com