

15th Edition of

SAAJHI SAMAJHI

Healing the Healers: Building Resilience on the Frontline

EVENT REPORT

Wednesday, 26 November 2025



About Tech Mahindra Foundation

We are the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of Tech Mahindra Limited, a Mahindra Group Company. Since 2006, guided by the vision of Empowerment through Education, the Foundation drives impactful initiatives in education and employability, with a strong focus on empowering women and persons with disabilities. Operating across 20 locations in India and collaborating with over 90 partners, our initiatives are creating meaningful and inclusive opportunities for all.

Since FY 2012-13, the Foundation has impacted 7,50,309* beneficiaries through initiatives across 20 locations in India.

As on 30 September 2025.



Our Focus Areas

EMPLOYABILITY

SMART (Skills-for-Market Training) is the Foundation's flagship employability program to empower youth from under-served urban communities with promising career opportunities. This program has been able to successfully bridge the gap between the demand and supply in various manufacturing as well as service industries. The program strongly focuses on bringing gender parity in the workforce by training more women. SMART+ also focuses on bringing more persons with disabilities under the ambit of the program.

EDUCATION

The Foundation is committed to creating inclusive learning opportunities through its Shikshantaar and ARISE+ programs. Our key focus areas include enhancing school governance, enriching children's learning experiences, and facilitating the continuous professional development of school stakeholders. By addressing the needs of children with disabilities at every stage from early detection of disabilities, integration of assistive technology, tailored interventions, and parent counseling, we aim to create an empowering learning environment.

VOLUNTEERING

Corporate Volunteering is at the heart of Tech Mahindra's ethos where Individual Social Responsibilities (ISR) is a way of life. TechM associates volunteer and contribute to driving positive social change while simultaneously enhancing their capacities for empathy and compassion. This is how we #Rise and find our joy in giving back to society!

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Keynote Speaker:

Dr. B. Bhaskar Rao

Chief Cardiothoracic Surgeon & Chairman & Managing Director KIMS Hospitals

Panelists:

Dr. Neeraj Jha

Founder & CEO, Hanuman Care

Dr. Shirisha Sathe

*Clinical Psychologist, Founder
SAF, Faculty, FLAME University*

Dr. Rakesh Shah

*Chief Operating Officer
KEM Hospital, Pune*

Featured Guest:

Mr. Bikesh Chauhan

*Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
Alumnus, Tech Mahindra SMART Academy
for Healthcare*

Ms. Sunera Ershad

*Associate Faculty,
Emergency Care Assistant Program
Tech Mahindra SMART Academy for Healthcare*

Moderator:

Dr. Nidhi Kewalramani

*Program Director - Healthcare Skilling
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Citation: Tech Mahindra Foundation (TMF). (2025).

Saajhi Samajh: Webinar Report. New Delhi.

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Material from this publication can only be used with acknowledgment.

Published by

TECH MAHINDRA FOUNDATION

Harijan Sevak Sangh Campus, Gandhi Ashram, Kingsway Camp, New Delhi - 110009

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Introduction:

Saajhi Samajh - The Fifteenth Edition

Saajhi Samajh (or Shared Understanding), is Tech Mahindra Foundation's attempt towards creating a platform for advocacy through discussion on issues related and relevant to the development sector in India. In the past, Tech Mahindra Foundation has hosted discussions focusing on areas such as Empowerment of caregivers of PwDs, Importance of eye health for children, Role of teachers in first aid in schools, Inclusive Intelligence and so on. The conference brings together an array of experts and specialists to participate in the conference.

Saajhi Samajh 15 was held as an online national dialogue on 26th November 2025, dedicated to the mental and emotional well-being of India's healthcare workforce. With the theme "*Healing the Healers: Building Resilience on the Frontline*", this edition brought attention to the unseen challenges faced by allied healthcare professionals who work in high-pressure, emotionally demanding environments every day. Through keynote addresses, panel discussions, and firsthand accounts, the session highlighted the urgent need to normalise conversations around mental health and provide institutional support to those who continually support others.

The discussion also highlighted the Foundation's ongoing efforts through the **Mind@Ease** program, emphasising the need to integrate emotional resilience, social-emotional learning (SEL), and psychological safety into healthcare training and workplace culture.

The Discussion aimed to answer the following:

1. The emotional and psychological challenges faced by frontline and allied healthcare workers.
2. The role of resilience-building, SEL, and supportive leadership in strengthening healthcare teams.
3. How educational and training ecosystems can integrate emotional well-being into curricula.
4. Systemic, institutional, and technological solutions for sustaining mental health in the healthcare sector.

Saajhi Samajh 15:

Healing the Healers - Building Resilience on the Frontline

The session began with the keynote address delivered by Dr. B. Bhaskar Rao, Chief Cardiothoracic Surgeon and Chairman & Managing Director of KIMS Group of Hospitals. Dr. Rao, one of India's most respected healthcare leaders, set the tone for the conversation by emphasising the urgent need to prioritise the emotional resilience of healthcare workers, particularly allied health professionals who form the backbone of India's healthcare delivery system.

Drawing from his decades of experience performing over 30,000 cardiothoracic surgeries, Dr. Rao highlighted the intense physical, emotional, and psychological pressures that frontline workers face every day. He acknowledged the silent struggles of those who support emergency rooms, intensive care units, patient transport, and pre-hospital care, noting that their mental health remains largely unspoken and unsupported.



Building Resilience on the Frontline: Discussions

Dr. Rao underlined that emotional fitness is as essential as technical skill in healthcare.

“Skills can be taught. But without emotional stability, even the most talented professional will struggle in a high-pressure clinical environment.”

He also urged healthcare workers to normalize seeking help, stressing that resilience is not about suppressing emotions but finding healthy ways to navigate them.

Keynote Address



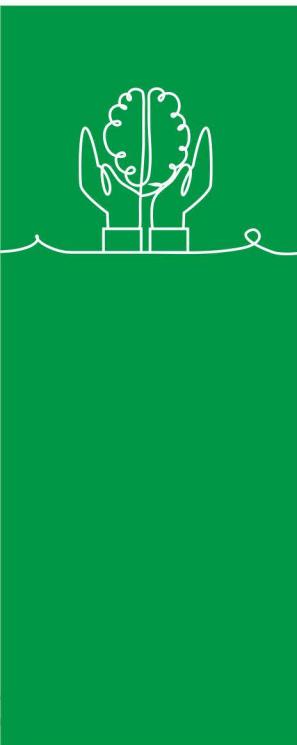
Dr. B. Bhaskar Rao

*Chief Cardiothoracic Surgeon, Chairman & Managing Director
KIMS Group of Hospitals*

“Allied Healthcare professionals are not just able to stand on their own, they are also helping others in saving lives.”

Highlights on the Panel discussion:

Dr. Rao began by acknowledging the profound emotional weight carried by healthcare professionals, especially those working in emergency and critical care settings. He emphasised that the pressure of responding to life-threatening situations, witnessing suffering, and making rapid decisions leaves an invisible but lasting impact on the mind. As he described, *“When you’re in the middle of a crisis, you don’t think about yourself. But later, the memories, the losses, those stay with you.”* He stressed that emotional fatigue is not a sign of weakness but an expected human response, one that deserves attention, empathy, and structured support.

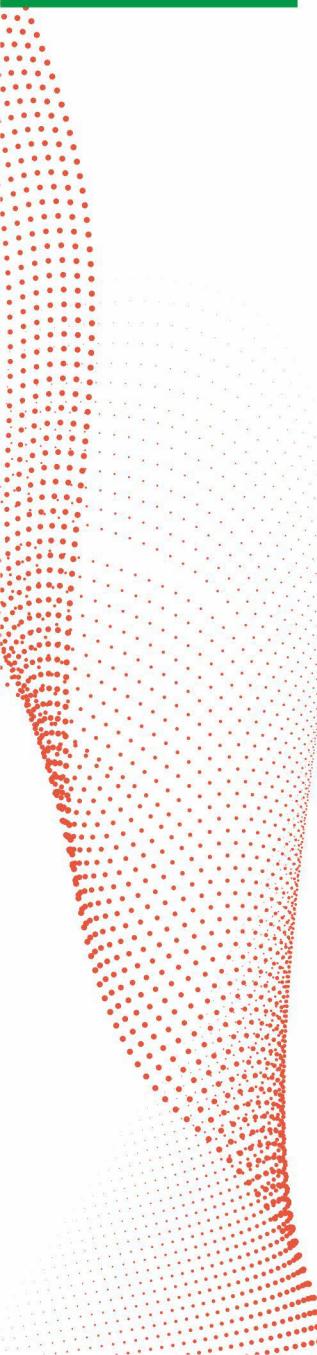


He then turned to the systemic responsibility of healthcare institutions in fostering psychological safety. Dr. Rao made it clear that resilience should not be treated as an individual burden, nor should emotional well-being be left to personal coping alone. Instead, organisations must embed mental health practices, such as reflective spaces, counselling, and supportive supervision, into their culture. As he noted, *"We cannot leave resilience to individual coping. Support systems must be built into the organisational culture"*.

Dr. Rao also highlighted the indispensable role of allied healthcare professionals, including EMTs, technicians, emergency assistants, and paramedical staff. These workers, he said, often serve as the first point of contact for patients in distress, making their emotional readiness just as important as their clinical competence. He remarked that they are "the hands that hold patients, the calm in chaos," and therefore their well-being must remain central in any healthcare reform or training agenda.

A significant part of Dr. Rao's message focused on the need to normalise help-seeking and integrate emotional intelligence into healthcare training. He urged young professionals to recognise emotional awareness and empathy as essential components of their professional identity rather than optional soft skills. In his view, the ability to understand one's own emotional state and seek timely support is just as important as mastering clinical procedures.

Finally, Dr. Rao appreciated Tech Mahindra Foundation's initiatives, particularly Mind@Ease for strengthening emotional resilience across the allied health ecosystem. He underscored that the future of healthcare depends not only on technical excellence but on nurturing compassionate, emotionally grounded professionals who can sustain the demands of their roles with dignity and confidence.



Voices from the Frontline: Lived Experiences



Mr. Bikesh Chauhan

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)

Alumnus, Tech Mahindra SMART Academy for Healthcare

“ *Har roz kuch na kuch aisa hota hai jo dimag par bhaar chhod data hai. Cases toh handle kar lete hain... par unke baad jo soch rehta hai, woh mushkil hota hai. / Every day something happens that leaves a weight on the mind. We manage the cases... but it's the thoughts that remain afterward that are the hardest.* **”**

Key Highlights:

In conversation, Mr. Bikesh Chauhan shared a candid glimpse into the emotional and psychological realities of working as an Emergency Medical Technician. With over seven years of experience in high-intensity emergency response, he spoke about the constant unpredictability of his work, where every call may involve trauma, critical cases, or life-threatening conditions. He described the “mental load” that follows EMTs long after a shift ends, explaining that the physical strain often feels easier than the emotional residue of the cases they attend.

Mr. Bikesh recalled an acute myocardial infarction case that continues to stay with him. The patient was on the brink of collapse, and despite the team's best efforts, there were moments during the transfer when he feared they would not make it in time. He shared that such situations, filled with urgency, fear, and responsibility, leave deep emotional impressions. “*Kabhi kabhi ambulance ke bahar bas do minute saans lena padta hai... warna dimaag band ho jaata hai*,” he added, describing the brief moments EMTs take to steady themselves before moving on to the next case.

He emphasized that while EMT training prepares them for clinical procedures, the emotional journey is something they learn only on the field. Coping often involves quiet pauses, peer support, and moments of self-reflection. Bikesh's story highlighted the resilience required to work on the frontlines, and the importance of building structured emotional and psychological support into emergency care systems.



Ms. Sunera Ershad

Associate Faculty, Emergency Care Assistant Program
Tech Mahindra SMART Academy for Healthcare

“ Emergency mein har doosra case trauma hota tha. Aap strong banne ki koshish karte ho... par kuch cases seedha dil par lagte hain. / In the emergency department, every second case was trauma. You try your best to stay strong... but some cases hit straight at the heart. **”**

Key Highlights:

Ms. Sunera Ershad shared her journey of working for over eleven years across Emergency, CCU, and Pediatric units before transitioning into the role of an educator. She described her early years in emergency care as formative yet emotionally demanding, where she routinely handled trauma cases, critical Pediatric emergencies, and sudden, unpredictable situations. Despite being clinically competent, the emotional weight of these cases accumulated silently over the years.

She narrated a pivotal incident that became the turning point in her career, a young patient who had consumed poison and could not be saved despite all efforts. The case deeply affected her, prompting her to reflect on her emotional limits. "Woh case mujhe tod gaya," she shared, adding that it was this experience that made her step back from clinical duties and choose a role where she could continue contributing to healthcare without compromising her mental well-being.

In her current role as an Associate Faculty member, Ms. Sunera focuses not only on technical training but also on preparing students for the emotional realities of emergency care. She actively incorporates discussions on mental strength, reflective practices, and self-awareness into her sessions. "Main students ko sirf procedures nahi sikhati, main unhe batati hoon ki kab rukna hai, kaise breathe lena hai, aur kab help lena zaroori hai," she explained. Her story underscored the importance of mentorship, emotional safety, and supportive learning environments in shaping future healthcare professionals.



Highlights from the Panellists

Healing the Healers - Building Resilience on the Frontline



Dr. Niraj Jha

*Founder & CEO
Hanuman Care*

"Ambulance staff ke liye appreciation bohot kam hota hai. Mental load zyada hota hai, par baat karne ke liye space nahi hoti. / Ambulance staff receive very little recognition. The mental load is heavy, but they often have no space to talk about it.

Key Highlights:

Dr. Niraj Jha spoke about the unique pressures faced by ambulance and pre-hospital care staff, describing their work as unpredictable, emotionally draining, and often under-appreciated. He highlighted that while EMTs and ambulance teams are the first responders in most emergencies, they operate with limited visibility and minimal recognition, which adds significantly to their emotional burden. He noted that many EMTs face overwhelming cases, accidents, deteriorating patients, family distress, yet lack structured avenues to process their experiences.

Dr. Jha shared that one of the biggest challenges in pre-hospital care is the absence of systematic reporting mechanisms that allow ambulance staff to document difficult incidents, seek guidance, or flag emotional distress. He explained that without such structures, most frontline workers "absorb" the trauma silently, which can lead to burnout. He also spoke about the innovations at Hanuman Care, such as e-rickshaw ambulances and tech-enabled response models, that help improve service delivery but stressed that technological progress must go hand in hand with psychological support for the workforce.

He advocated for better engagement, incentives, and structured well-being programs for ambulance professionals, emphasizing that mental health is foundational for effective emergency response. Dr. Jha concluded by calling for closer collaboration between organisations, training institutions, and mental health professionals to create more supportive ecosystems for pre-hospital care teams.



Dr. Shirisha Sathe

*Clinical Psychologist, Founder, Shyamchi Aai Foundation (SAF)
Faculty, FLAME University*

“ *Resilience ka matlab yeh nahi ki aapko kuch feel na ho, resilience is the ability to feel deeply and still find your balance again. / Resilience doesn't mean you stop feeling; it means you learn how to regain your balance even after feeling intensely.* **”**

Key Highlights:

With nearly four decades of experience in clinical psychology, Dr. Shirisha Sathe brought a deep and compassionate perspective to the conversation. She explained that healthcare workers often suppress their emotional responses due to the perceived need to remain composed, but this suppression, when prolonged, can create psychological strain. She stressed that emotional experiences must be acknowledged, not denied, and that resilience is a learned skill rooted in self-awareness, self-acceptance, and supportive systems.

Dr. Sathe outlined six essential elements of resilience, which include emotional regulation, problem-solving, social connectedness, purpose in life, self-management, and reflective growth. She underscored the need for preventive mental health practices rather than reactive approaches, encouraging institutions to build emotional learning into healthcare education rather than offering support only after burnout occurs. She emphasized that healthcare workers should be equipped with psychological tools early in training, just as they are taught clinical procedures.

She also stressed the importance of sabbaticals and recovery periods for healthcare professionals, noting that *“breaks are not luxuries, they are necessities for long-term well-being.”* Dr. Sathe closed by reiterating that resilience-building must be treated as a critical competency within healthcare systems and not as an optional or extracurricular element.



Dr. Rakesh Shah

*Chief Operating Officer
KEM Hospital, Pune*

“ *Burnout ki pehchaan results mein nahi, behavior aur body language mein hoti hai. Leaders ko yeh signals samajhna zaroori hai. / Burnout doesn't show up in results, it shows up in behavior and body language. Leaders must learn to recognise these signals.* **”**

Key Highlights:

Drawing from his experience managing over 1,700 staff members, Dr. Rakesh Shah shed light on the operational and organisational dimensions of mental well-being. He described hospitals as fast-paced, high-pressure environments where frontline teams face ambiguity, diversity of cases, shifting responsibilities, and systemic constraints, all of which can contribute to stress and burnout. He shared that one of the greatest challenges in healthcare management is identifying emotional distress early, as healthcare workers rarely verbalize their struggles.

Dr. Shah explained that leaders must spend time on the ground observing their teams, because subtle shifts, such as withdrawal, irritability, hesitation, or reduced collaboration, often indicate deeper emotional fatigue. He described the ABCD(E) framework used in his hospital: Accept, Believe, Commit, Discover, and Evaluate/Enjoy, which helps staff build clarity, alignment, and shared purpose. Through town halls, feedback loops, and communication channels, KEM Hospital aims to create psychologically safe spaces where staff feel heard and supported.

He also shared that technology can be used as a constructive tool, not to penalize mistakes but to understand patterns, identify gaps, and provide targeted support. Dr. Shah emphasized that hiring practices, onboarding processes, and workplace culture have a direct impact on well-being, and organisations must invest intentionally in building supportive ecosystems. He concluded by affirming that strong, emotionally grounded teams lead to better patient care and healthier healthcare institutions.

Conclusion:

The 15th edition of Saajhi Samajh brought together experts from healthcare, psychology, emergency response, and institutional leadership to address a critical but often overlooked priority: the mental and emotional well-being of India's allied healthcare workforce. Through lived experiences, reflective discussions, and expert insights, the session highlighted the urgent need to support frontline healthcare workers who regularly operate in high-stress, emotionally charged environments while carrying the invisible burdens of trauma, loss, and responsibility.

Speakers emphasized that resilience cannot be treated as an individual responsibility alone. Instead, it must be cultivated through structured organisational systems, empathetic leadership, and training environments that prepare healthcare workers not just for the technical demands of their roles but also for the emotional realities they will encounter. The conversation underscored the importance of psychological safety, reflective practice, mentorship, and access to mental health support for strengthening the workforce.

The event emphasized:

- The need to acknowledge and address the emotional labour carried by allied health professionals.
- The importance of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) and resilience training into healthcare education.
- The role of organisational culture, communication, and leadership in fostering psychological safety.
- The value of technology-enabled support systems that offer training, monitoring, and early intervention.
- The responsibility of institutions to create structured, accessible mental health programs—not as optional benefits, but as essential components of quality healthcare.

The dialogue called for systemic change, cross-sector collaboration, and a renewed commitment to supporting those who serve as the backbone of India's healthcare delivery system. It shifted the lens from viewing resilience as an individual trait to recognising it as a shared responsibility, one that requires coordination between educators, administrators, mental health professionals, and policymakers.

Key Message:

Healing the healers begins with listening to them, learning from them, and building systems that care for them. For our healthcare workforce to remain strong, resilient, and compassionate, emotional well-being must be treated as a core pillar of healthcare, not an afterthought.

Glimpses of the Event



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