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Geriatric age: An age to heal and care to hold their decline

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Abstract

Ageing is an irreparable biological process and considered as main social problem all over the world. It is stated as the inevitable consequence of decline in productiveness. With the advancement of different technologies and modernization, there has been a decrease in the mortality rate, increase in awareness, nutrition, advancement in health care facilities and an increase in life expectancy. In this review paper, main emphasis given on the challenges faced by older adults in daily life activities, normal age –related changes in numerous body systems and ways to improve the quality of the life of seniors. When individuals reach at their end of years then they experience mobility issues, malnutrition problems, medication side effects, need assistance for daily life activities and their different body systems will be affected and does not work properly. And in that situation we can suggest different ways to improve the quality life of your loved ones. A positive view of life can help the older adults to alleviate different type of problems which they faced according to their increasing age.

Keywords: age, older adults, problems, life and loved one

Introduction

Geriatrics is a term related to an old person, especially one receiving special care. It is derived from Greek word “geron” means old man and “iatros” means healer. It aims to promote health by preventing and treating diseases and disabilities in older adults. However, it is sometimes called medical gerontology. Different problems such as cognitive, hearing, visual impairment, delirium, mobility, malnutrition, falls, gait disorders, sleep disorders, fatigue and dizziness are more common in older adults and have a major impact on quality of life and disability. These type of problems found in geriatrics can best be identified by a geriatric assessment. Geriatric assessment is a diagnostic and treatment process which requires both evaluation and management. It includes evaluation of multiple issues that influence an older adults health like physical, cognitive, affective, social, financial, environment and spiritual etc. Programs related to this type of assessment are usually initiated through a referral by the primary care clinician in the hospital setting. Older adults requires increased needs for health care and medications with increase in age particularly in polypharmacy (taking multiple medications). This polypharmacy may increase the risk of drug interactions or adverse drug reactions. Hosseini *et al.* (2018) ^[5] revealed that the prevalence of polypharmacy in his study was 23.1%, which was 32.7% in women and 15.2% in men. The most prevalent group of medications used in both genders was cardiovascular drugs. Problem like delirium in seniors may be caused by a minor problem such as constipation or by something as serious and life threatening as a heart attack. Also older adults have some multiple nutrient deficiencies because of physiological, social and economic factors. Nutrient supplementation medical care facilities particularly given to those older adults who are nutrient deficient. Sometimes older adults can't make decisions for themselves due to long term dementia. Many of these type of problems are treatable, if the root cause can be properly discovered. So, appropriate health services and care will be essential to overcoming these type of disabilities. Healthcare centers are the places where patients with poor health conditions go for treatment, which is provided by specialists and other care professionals. From which older adults maintain their health and quality of life as grow older. General issues of geriatric health maintenance and the assessment of specific geriatric populations requires specialized health care professionals in geriatric to address the health care needs of this growing population. There is a need to highlight the challenges faced by the older adults in daily life activities, normal age- related changes in different body systems and to suggest different ways to improve the quality life of seniors.

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Objectives of the study

- To explore the challenges faced by older adults in daily life activities.
- To discuss about normal age –related changes in numerous body systems
- To suggest different ways to improve the quality life of seniors.

Review of literature

Lena *et al.* (2009) ^[7] results showed that there is a need for geriatric counseling centers that can take care of their physical and psychological needs. The stringent rules for eligibility to social security schemes should be made more flexible to cover a larger geriatric population.

Pahor *et al.* (2014) ^[8] reported that in a study of 1635 older people with moderate mobility impairments, a large scale mixed aerobic, resistance and balance exercise intervention reported a 8% higher incidence of serious adverse events compared with a (sedentary) health education programme.

Ramamurthy *et al.* (2014) ^[9] conducted a cross-sectional study on 175 rural elderly. And reported that the prevalence of hearing impairment was 72% and that of visual impairment was 48%. The overall prevalence of dual sensory impairment among the study subjects was 17.7% and 32.6% depending on whether traditional pure tone average or high-frequency pure tone average was used to define moderate or worse degree of hearing impairment and increased significantly with increase in age.

Amiri (2018) ^[5] reported that existence of nuclear family system, and the impact of economic and social transformation have focused on the peculiar problems which the old age people are facing nowadays, and the duties of young generation towards the old age people is being eroded.

Garcia and Navarro (2018) ^[3] concluded that multidimensional evaluation is an effective tool to evaluate the quality life and the objective and subjective health of the elderly and the participants have a good perception of their quality of life, considering health, leisure, environmental quality, functional capacity, level of satisfaction, social support, social networks, and positive social interactions as the determinants of their well-being.

Kapur (2018) ^[6] aimed to acquire an understanding of the problems of the aged people in India. As with increasing age, they experience various problems like decline in health conditions, retirement, financial problems, loneliness and dependence upon others. In addition to these problems, some others problems such as social, economic, psychological, health, crime, abuse and other miscellaneous problems are taken into account. And formulate different measures and policies that aimed to alleviate the problems of the elders.

Abdi *et al.* (2019) ^[2] highlighted that older people living with chronic conditions have unmet care needs related to their physical and psychological health, social life, as well as the environment in which they live and interact.

Ho *et al.* (2021) ^[4] results revealed that twelve participants had two or more sensory impairments, mainly concurrent hearing and vision, which became apparent when a situation/individual alerted them to change/s occurring. They were less aware of impaired smell, taste and touch.

Research Methodology

This review paper is descriptive in nature. This paper is based on a review and analysis of the published scientific literature addressing the linkages of different challenges or problems

faced by older adults with increasing their age. The secondary data and information have been analyzed for preparing the paper extensively and have been collected from different scholars and researchers, published books, articles published in different journals and from different websites. Duplicate articles and other works that did not have information's related to the study's addition criteria were excluded.

Challenges faced by older adults in daily life activities

With increasing age, older adults meets with many more kind of different challenges in daily life routine which are discussed given below:

Personal Care

As with increasing age, disability rates are relatively high among adults over age 85. They need assistance in daily life activities like dressing, bathing and personal grooming and are unable in instrumental activities of daily living such as cooking. Personal care is an important daily basic need for a senior citizen. A home health and other family members can help them in daily life activities task, if necessary.

Advance Directives and End of Life Care

Many older adults above 85-year olds with multiple chronic conditions will die within a few years. When complete independence is no longer practical, every 85-year old adult must require a health care agent who can make complicated decisions in an emergency. Advanced clinicians and professional directives on life-sustaining therapies such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, mechanical ventilation, and tube feeding are the different options enable patients to exert some control over their end of life care. We all need to prepare for the inevitable, but death is a difficult or complex topic for people to discuss or consider plans for. Older adults and their families need support when their loved one consider the end of life options.

Transportation

Transportation is other challenge faced by the older adults when they no longer drive. In that situation older adults totally depends on others for their own basic necessities such as medical appointments and physical therapy. Have a caretaker or assistant can help the older adults who visits on certain days to take an elderly person to run errands, to attend a social function or to go to the doctor is beneficial.

Nutrition

Your loved one needs proper nutrition to stay healthy and enjoy a comfortable life in the society. Have a nutritionist or caregiver or dietician go over a daily meal plan to know which foods best fit according to the growing age. Meals can be prepared on a daily basis so that it is easier for the senior citizen to heat and eat a warm meal every day. If they are having a proper and balanced diet then they live more in their life and away from problems like under nutrition and micro nutrient related malnutrition.

Difficulty with everyday tasks and mobility

Many of your loved ones require additional care especially when they have mobility issues and this care can be provided by different family members. Older adults mobility and dexterity will naturally decline with increase in age and make their everyday tasks more difficult and prevents them from being social, pursuing interests or taking part in different

types of activities in which they can enjoy. More support is required to enable older adults not only to live independently through different types of programmes which focus on safety, balance, fitness and mobility etc.

Hospitalization

Hospitalization is more common challenge among people over age 85 and need proper medication to remain physically fit and fine. Their life begins with more acute care in the home which help them to prevent hospital complications such as functional decline and iatrogenic infection. After home care, they require adequate medical care such as doctor's visits, dental care, foot care, eye care, physical and psychiatric therapy, if suffer from different multiple diseases. They require home health nursing system which focus on their daily plan of care.

Medication

Sometimes older adults take multiple medications without any prescription that condition is known as polypharmacy. When having five medications continuously, the risk of an adverse drug event is very high which increases the risk of falls, disability and other negative outcomes. In that condition, caretakers must make the right balance between too few and too many drugs that will help the older adults to ensure increased longevity, improved overall health and enhanced functioning and quality of life when choosing to start or stop medications in people over age 85 or above.

Normal age-related changes in numerous body systems

The following systematic changes affect the body of older adults.

Digestive system

At this age, people feel digestive system is less affected as compared to other parts of the body, Older people are more likely to develop intolerance of dairy products because digestive tract produce less lactase (enzyme which the body needs to digest milk) which increase the risk of diarrhea when they consume milk products. In large intestine, materials move through a little more slowly due to constipation problems. The liver tends to become smaller due to decrease in number of cells. As a result, less blood flows through it and the liver less efficiently able to remove the drugs and other substances from the body.

Endocrine System

The levels and activity of some hormones produced by endocrine glands was decrease for e.g. in pituitary gland, the vascular network decreases and connective tissue increases, without functional change. The secretion of follicle-stimulating hormone increases in postmenopausal women but remains unchanged in men. Although, the plasma triiodothyronine level decreases 25% to 40%, and the metabolic rate slows with age. Parathyroid changes are unclear but no functional changes are seen in the thyroid gland. If aging causes a decrease in the secretion of parathyroid hormone then the secretion of glucocorticoids decreases in the adrenal glands. The pancreas produces less insulin (helps to control the level of sugar in blood) and with decrease in insulin secretion there is less effective maintenance of blood glucose. Older adults have higher rates of diabetes due to decrease in insulin.

Cardiovascular system

Although cardiac enlargement occurs in some older adults but this is not an age related change. Decrease in myocardial elasticity becomes the left ventricle thicker (25%). Fat infiltration occurs, connective tissue decreases and lipofuscin appears in cardiac cells. The ability of the heart rate to increase with stress may declines and the resting heart rate and cardiac output remains unchanged that will result in reduced capacity of exercise and fatigue. In older adults, a heart rate of more than 90 beats per minute indicates significant physiological stress and increase wall thickness. The heart tolerates tachycardia poorly in old age and requires more time to come to a normal rate and blood flow to all organs will decrease.

Nervous system

A decrease in brain function with aging may be the result of numerous factors that include changes in fewer neurotransmitters, peripheral cerebral neurons, decrease nerve cells, toxic substances that accumulate in the brain over time, and inherited changes which increase the risk of sensation, slower reflexes, clumsiness, slow coordinated movements, increase in response time which affect balance, gait, agility and can lead to functional status decline. There is also an increased risk of hyperthermia, hypothermia, sleep disorders and delirium etc. Cerebral blood flow and oxygen use decreases and more severe in men as compared to women. Because of age related changes, the brain doesn't work properly and different mental functions such as vocabulary, short term memory, the ability to learn new material, recall words may be reduced after age 70. Therefore in older adults, damaged nerves, sensation and strength will be decreased.

Gastrointestinal System

In gastrointestinal system, absorption of vitamin B12, folic acid and carbohydrates was declines. In addition, risk of osteoporosis increases due to malabsorption of calcium and Vitamin D and gastric secretion decreases and pH increases. Constipation and fecal inconsistency is very common in older adults. Age specific changes in the oral cavity can affect the nutritional status of older adults. These include loss of teeth, poorly fitting dentures, decrease in saliva production in mouth, taste buds decline, affect chewing impairment, fluid and electrolyte balance. And reduced food intake possibly leads to malnutrition, dehydration, weight loss, decrease appetite and food intake and may contribute to dysphagia and aspiration.

Visual Sensory System

Visual Acuity

Visual acuity decreases normally with age and multiple structural changes seen in older people are known as presbyopia. Older adults suffer from different types of eye conditions such as cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma, problems with glare and diabetic retinopathy which affect a senior's vision and making their night driving riskier. Some eye conditions like cataract and glaucoma can be corrected through surgical procedures. Early detection and treatment of vision problems by ophthalmologist prevents permanent and worsening eye damage. It is typically safe and sometimes helps function.

Hearing Loss

In older adults, hearing is another sense that weakens according to the growing age. Presbycusis and increased cerumen production with aging contribute to difficulty hearing. Difficulty in hearing can make it harder for seniors to notice horns, sirens and noises and other different issues while driving, which can be very dangerous for them and others. If it is significant then consider audiologist for your loved ones which guide the assistive devices for treatment of hearing problems.

Ways to improve the quality life of seniors

A positive view of life can help the older adults to alleviate some of the medical issues such as cognitive decline, stress, lack of energy and appetite. From regular exercise to social interaction, there are numerous ways you can use to improve the quality life of seniors.

Monitor and treat depression

Depression late in life affects millions of seniors who belongs to the age group of above 65. It is a type of mood disorder that ranks as the most pervasive mental health concern among older adults. It can be caused by stressful life events like retirement or losing a spouse, sleeping problems, heart attacks, physical pain and discomfort. If untreated, it can lead to physical and mental impairments and impede social functioning. To improve the quality of life, it's important to recognize and get familiar with the signs of depression. To treat different types of symptoms, your loved one should receive help from a doctor, psychologist, therapist or counselor.

Help them feel useful and needed

From the very young to the very old, everyone wants to be useful. Do your best and find ways to make your loved one feel useful and needed. If they can't do their tasks efficiently then ask them for help with tasks they can handle such as folding laundry, organizing drawers, writing grocery lists, latest stories on the news and preparing food for cooking etc. so that they can alleviate that fear of becoming a burden in the family and feel like a contributing member of the household.

Encourage regular physical activity and engage in outdoor activities

Regular physical activity in seniors improves quality of life by preventing stroke and improves heart health boosts the immune system, relieving anxiety, improving sleep quality, lowering blood pressure and improving overall stamina. Regular physical activity helps the seniors to keep both body and mind feeling balanced and positive. Create a green space for your loved one where they can grow a garden and interact with something natural. A study conducted by Rugbeer *et al.* (2017) ^[10] in The Pan African Medical Journal revealed that seniors who exercised three times per week had higher social functioning and vitality.

Keep them mentally active

Every person needs mental stimulation. Offer daily brain games such as Sudoku, crossword puzzles, reading, writing and storytelling etc. all are the great activities for mental stimulation and keep the mind engaged and sharp. Seniors need these type of mental activities to improve cognitive function and also to maintain an overall sense of wellbeing. Asking them to share stories of their past which can help them

to combat cognitive impairments of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Help them stay connected with family, friends and community

Seniors can often feel isolated and lonely as they grows older, especially if they have mobility issues. These are at greater risk for dementia or shorter lifespans. In that type of situation, arrange schedule for regular visits and family outings, transportation facilities to visit senior centers, church or community functions. Encourage them to attend parties like birthday, weddings and holiday etc. These types of practices will help your aging senior to stay connected to family, friends, and community.

Call a geriatric care manager

Hire a geriatric care manager who specializes in geriatrics and who can help you and your family to identify needs and find ways to meet your needs like discuss different topics and complex issues, make home visits and suggest needed services, address emotional concerns, make short and long term plans, evaluate home care needs, select care personnel, coordinate medical services, evaluate other living arrangements and provide caregiver stress relief etc. They are helpful when family members live far apart. They will check your seniors from time to time to make sure your needs have not changed and allow the family members to spend more quality time with their seniors and therefore make better use of the time. Our seniors have access to some of the best doctors and hospitals in the world. And yet, their quality of care and life still need to be vastly improved through these types of above ways which definitely improves the quality of life of your seniors.

Strategies and Recommendations for Geriatric's healing and care

At Primary Level

- Training of Medical Officers, Peripheral health workers & volunteers and make the older people aware about the problems and services available to them.
- Screening camps & mobile clinics for reaching out to the elderly population that focus on different diseases of the elderly.
- Involve non-governmental organizations particularly in difficult to reach areas.
- Ensure good quality geriatric health care services according to basic felt needs.
- "Community Geriatric Health Workers" may be trained to provide home care to the disabled elderly population.
- Should provide female medical officer to address the increasing health problems of elderly women.
- Strengthening the elderly in the process of self-help by means of physical, psychosocial, and vocational rehabilitation
- Capacity building of the community leaders.

At Secondary level

- Set up geriatric wards.
- Distinct outpatient department services providing screening services as well as curative and rehabilitative services.
- Screening for non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, psychiatric disorders, nutritional anemia and tuberculosis which help in early

detection of risk diseases and their adequate management.

At Tertiary level

- Set up a comprehensive multidisciplinary team-providing specialist services.
- Separate facility: Everything under one roof
- Rehabilitation team includes physician, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist, dietician, nurse and social worker which focused on the patients functional abilities.

Conclusion

Staying healthy and feeling your best is important at any age. Geriatric is a term which is related to an old person, especially with regard to their healthcare. Old age can't be cured but we can prevent the health problems in old person by increasing the awareness and timely interventions. They are unable to take care for themselves especially when they have mobility issues. Older people with different disabilities learn slowly and have difficulty with abstract concepts. This paper throws some light on the challenges faced by the older adults in daily life activities, normal age related changes in different body systems and to suggest different ways to improve the quality life of seniors. Due to advancement of new technologies and modernization, different problems of older adults will be easily solved by different treatment options available for those who are suffering from multiple diseases. It is the responsibility of younger ones to take care of older adults when symptoms are spotted and providing love and emotional support to help ensure the highest quality of life possible.

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