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World Brain Day 2016: celebrating brain health in an ageing population

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Brain health in an ageing population; theme for World Brain Day 2016

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The World Federation of Neurology annually celebrates the world Brain day on the 22nd of July with a different theme. This year it is "Brain Health in an ageing population". Currently there are more than 800 million individuals over the age of 60 years (12% of world population) and this is growing rapidly with an expectation to reach more than two billion (21% of world population) by 2050. Currently 70% of world's older population lives in developed and developing countries while 30% live in less developed countries but by 2025, 80% of older population will be living in less developed countries. Older persons are projected to exceed number of children in 2047. Octogenarians are 15% of current elderly population.¹ The growing proportion of the elderly population has major social, health and economic consequences.

It is estimated that 10-20% of people with age 60-80 years suffer from one of three neurological diseases which include stroke, Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's Diseases. Non communicable diseases, musculoskeletal, psychiatric diseases and injuries are common in elderly². This is compounded by poverty which is high among older persons. These factors constitute increased pressure on social support systems. In developed countries today, almost half of the health care expenditure is related to care of older persons and it is projected to increase to two thirds by 2030.³ The same trends are expected in developing and less developed countries by 2050.

Brain health is one of the most important determinants of social and economic well-being of older persons. Health care authorities are deeply concerned with the current status and future trends of a growing population. The World Federation of Neurology (WFN) has stepped forward to dedicate this

year's World Brain Day to ageing populations. Our intention is not just to celebrate a day but to increase awareness about the management and prevention of brain diseases affecting the elderly and to improve concepts and actual brain health support among young populations. Brain damage could be prevented or reduced and quality of life can be improved for the elderly if targeted interventions are instituted early in life. We cannot stop ageing but we can learn how to age with healthy brains. Over the next two to three decades, we need to focus on awareness and targeted interventions.

Age is obviously not a modifiable risk factor but brain health is. Stroke and vascular dementia, the most common neurological diseases affecting elderly populations are largely preventable with effective, established interventions. Education, cognitive exercises, physical activity and nutrition are important areas of intervention for prevention and slowing down of cognitive decline. Emotional health is as important as cognitive health. Other important areas for intervention in the ageing population include injuries, substance abuse, neurodegenerative diseases and poly pharmacy.

The WFN has 119 national neurology associations which function under its umbrella with more than 50,000 member neurologists. Hundreds of public awareness activities, media briefings and educational programs are planned for this day. The WFN is a NGO in official relationship with the WHO. There are many organizations working for research, support and advocacy related to the ageing population including Alzheimer's Association, International Federation on ageing, American associations of retired persons (AARP), United Nations Population Fund, National institute of ageing(USA), European Brain council and World Psychiatry Association among others. The WFN is planning to collaborate with these organizations for improved prevention, care, research and outcome of the ageing populations of the world. These organizations need to work together for a better future of the ageing population across the globe especially in developing and underdeveloped countries.

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