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Getting care of older people right: the need for appropriate frailty assessment?

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Globally, health and social care is facing extraordinary challenges due to changing patterns of disease, changing expectations of patients, financial restrictions and an ever-increasing ageing population. It is estimated that globally, the number of people aged 60 and over will increase from 900 million in 2015 to 1400 million by 2030 and 2100 million by 2050 (Kinsella & Phillips 2005). If these predictions do materialize, figures could rise up to 3200 million by 2100 ((WHO 2016). The World Health Organization(WHO) Health Assembly have produced *The Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health 2016–2020:towards a world in which everyone can live a long and healthy life (2016)* in which they set out two goals; to utilise ‘five years of evidence-based action to maximize functional ability that reaches every person; and by 2020,establish evidence and partnership necessary to support a Decade of Healthy Ageing from 2020–2030’. This Assembly specified five key strategic objectives:

- commitment to action on Healthy Ageing in every country;
- developing age-friendly environments;
- aligning health systems to the needs of older populations;
- developing sustainable and equitable systems for providing long-term care; and
- improving measurement, monitoring and research on Healthy Ageing.

It is timely and fitting that in this special joint issue from Wiley Publications, that ageing research is highlighted. This publication coincides with 5th European Nursing Congress ‘Caring for Older People: How can we do the right things right?’, in which researchers from all over the world will be presenting their work on issues concerning the care of older people. In this editorial we have selected articles from the Journal of Clinical Nursing, Journal of Advanced Nursing and the International Journal of Older People Nursing to highlight the importance of high quality nursing research to generate a more individualistic, cultural sensitive and evidence approach towards the care for older people. These papers come from a variety of cultural perspectives and cover a range of research methods, but all present strongly articulated arguments for effective assessment and management of issues related to nursing care for older people, which by design or default fit the five strategic objectives of the WHO strategy.

Global ageing has profound implications for the strategic planning of health care around the world, which is increasingly becoming caring for older people. Not all older people have problems, and Bergland et al. (2015), in this special edition, suggest a model centred on thriving in older age. Such assessments seek to accentuate what people can do to thrive, thus preventing further health threats. However, current evidence would suggest that health care models do not always meet the individual needs and living circumstances of older people who are pre frail or frail (Care Quality Commission 2016). Many global health care systems are designed and organised around single system illnesses, but many older people often have multi-system morbidities and benefit from an integrated approach to care. Frailty is the utmost problematic expression of the global ageing population, between a

quarter and half of people aged over 85 years are frail. Frailty is a distinctive state of health related to the ageing process where multiple bodily systems progressively lose their in-built capacity, it has been suggested that measurement of frailty could be used to indicate lack of healthy ageing. The term is commonly used to describe the care of older people, however it has been highlighted that the clinical implications of frailty are not well understood by many nurses (Heath & Phair 2011).

In this special issue, measurement of frailty is specifically addressed in one paper (Chang & Wen 2016). In their Taiwanese cross-sectional design study, Chang and Wen examined the impact the independent effect of frailty upon quality of life in older community-dwelling adults. Their results demonstrated that compared to pre-frail older people, frail older people have a poorer quality of life, summarising the importance of understanding the needs of these vulnerable members of society to ensure optimal nursing care.

The main aim of this editorial is to highlight issues around the assessment and nursing care of frailty in older people. To date, comprehensive geriatric assessment (CGA) would appear to be the most evidence-based process to detect and assess frailty. This process is initially resource intensive but proves better and quicker outcomes for the older person (Ellis et al. 2011). Screening for the need for a CGA, would ensure that only those in need will receive a full CGA. This would potentially facilitate a greater understanding into the complex nature of frailty and promote the development of nursing interventions to improve outcomes. We stress the importance of distinguishing and appropriately assessing older people who are frail from those who are not. Indeed, the British Geriatrics Society advocate that older people should be assessed for the presence of frailty during all interactions with health and social care professionals (British Geriatrics Society 2014). This would allow health care professionals to weigh up the benefits and risks of interventions and to allow individuals to make properly informed decisions about their healthcare. This may prevent invasive investigations and prescription of potentially harmful drugs.

The theme for this 5th European Nursing Congress centres on 'doing the right things right' for older people. Through accurate and timely detection of frailty it is possible to then do the right things right for older people.

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