

The blooming geriatric population: are we ready for it?

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Dear editor,

Ageing is an inevitable and irreversible biological process that commences with birth, continues throughout life and ends in death. As per the United Nations, the cutoff age for old age is 60 years and above. Globally the elderly population in 2020 was 727 million. In the coming three decades, the global population of older persons is predicted to increase by two-fold, thus by 2050 the number will reach over 1.5 billion. The increase in the segment of older population will be witnessed by all the regions between 2020 and 2050. Globally the older population forms 9.3 % of the total population in 2020 and is expected to rise to 16.0% by 2050. (1)

A great proportion, 61% of elderly population are from developing country, but by 2025 the proportion will increase to approximately 70%. The proportion of the elderly population of India and Karnataka is 8.6% and 7.7% respectively. In India the elderly population is predicted to rise to 19% that is 323 million people by 2050, and majority of them living in rural parts of India. The elderly dependency ratio will also increase from 0.12 to 0.31 because of decreased fertility rate and elongated life expectancy. (2,3)

Challenges in the old age

Such a boom in the population of elderly people will apparently lead to several

difficulties and often go unrecognized. With the advancing age, the physical and biological function/s will also slowly decline in their functional capacities. The elderly population not only encounter health problems but also other challenges like psychological and social problems. Malnutrition is one of the difficult circumstances noticed in elderly age group but often due attention is not given. (4)

A previous study was conducted in rural areas of Tamil Nadu to estimate the prevalence of nutritional status and NCD in 571 elderly population revealed that undernourishment (BMI<18.5) was seen in almost 50% of the group and it revealed the prevalence increased with advancing age and presence of comorbidity. Among the comorbidity, the prevalence of diabetes and hypertension was found to be more common than other diseases. (5)

Conclusion

The caregivers/family members of the elderly people play a major role; thus, they should be made aware of the role of family support, the concept of balanced diet, symptoms of malnutrition and the awareness about health facilities.

The healthcare workers should educate and create awareness about the health facilities and benefits available at the nearest health facility and also promote involvement of

local community, NGO's and organizations in the program.

To promote successful ageing, the government of India should form newer strategies, policies and programs intended towards geriatric population to uplift their nutritional status and also social well-being. Importance to research, training of the health care providers to tackle old age difficulties and funding should also be considered.

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