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Introduction

We are happy to bring you the issue of our journal featuring a series of articles devoted to various aspects of aging and old age.

Due to the rapidly aging population in Europe and the whole world, the problem of aging appears to be of great relevance, therefore there is a need to address this issue in its various aspects, i.e. both social and medical. The constantly growing number of elderly people has become a motivation to look at this topic from a broader perspective. Until recently, the predominant stereotype of the elderly was that of a person with limited mobility and lacking opportunities for an active life. This has led to negative consequences in social life. Widespread ageism reinforces the powerlessness and helplessness of seniors. The world of marketing and advertising, the Internet and the social media contribute to the negative stereotype of aging and old age. Elderly people tend to be marginalized professionally, absent from popular culture and excluded from various services, isolated in care-oriented institutions and often treated as addicts. Meanwhile, old age is clearly a time when one's life experience can be used for the good of family members, society and the entire human population.

Respect for the dignity of the elderly, as well as the variety of problems related to the aging process and old age lead us to believe that this important issue needs to be addressed. We believe that avoiding or rejecting public discussion of old age shows a lack of maturity in society and a denial of objective, biological reality, since the transience of human life is the natural consequence of being

human. It is worth underlining that old age, often called late adulthood, is only another stage of human existence in the cycle of human life from birth to death.

Every person dreams that their aging will be relatively trouble-free, i.e. without disease, with good physical and mental fitness, as well as with the opportunity to engage in social life, like in Rowe and Kahn's model of successful aging. Taking into account the continuous development of medicine, and thus the possibility of extending average life expectancy, as well as the decreasing fertility rates and migration processes, both Europe and the whole world are struggling with the problem of the constantly increasing number of older people. Because the aging process is accompanied by biological, psychological, social and spiritual changes, the variety of problems associated with it is extraordinary. The steadily growing number of older people poses new challenges and demands on health and social care services, as well as on local and state authorities.

One of the most typical characteristics of geriatric patients is multimorbidity, i.e. the co-occurrence of several diseases. With multimorbidity comes the increase in the need for board geriatric care, which is still insufficient in Poland. Therefore, the goal of every health care system is to provide and deliver the fullest possible range of medical services to elderly people. Senior care requires a balance between health care and social care. Lack of social support is as strong a risk factor for death as are recognized health factors. Therefore, there are several areas of social problems in senior care that can be distinguished at the micro, meso and macro levels.

Social issues related to the micro level mainly concern the problems of the individual, i.e. loneliness, reduced functional activity, limited access to social and medical care, financial hardships, difficulties in meeting one's spiritual needs and often low involvement of the community and family. The meso level is associated with difficulties in adapting the family to the presence of the older person, challenges in accepting changes in the older person's mentality, limited access to social and medical care, housing problems and the inability to meet one's social needs. Macro-level social issues include increased demand for social care, greater financial expenditure on medical and social care, adaptation of public facilities to serve the elderly and disabled, and social problems resulting from the marginalization of older people.

It is necessary to continuously improve the quality of life of seniors, which involves both external and internal factors. We must therefore work to create a civil society that is open to intergenerational cooperation and dialogue and that effectively counteracts generational antagonisms and negative stereotypes about old age. Population aging is one of the greatest socio-economic challenges facing the European community in the 21st century. It is also the largest challenge on a global scale because of the need to prepare an adequate medical and social base. It is worth remembering that an older person requires a different approach, both in medical and social terms, than someone in the prime of life.

The series of articles on the process of aging and old age, collected in this issue of the journal *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana*, is part of the discussion in the areas of theoretical gerontology, clinical gerontology, social gerontology, as well as those touching on the issue of institutional care for seniors.

The articles in this issue attempt to define what the aging process is and what old age is, as well as what medical, sociological and ethical implications are associated with the lives of elderly people and what role institutional social care plays and should play in their lives. They also address the risks posed by disease and unsafe practices that occur in the aging process. Although aging is a natural phenomenon that is intrinsic to human life, it also involves certain disruptions to the structure of the human personality.

The topics covered in this issue look at the question of aging and old age in various contexts. They are interdisciplinary and address fundamental dimensions of human life. The point of reference is that an elderly person requires not only medical care, but also spiritual and social assistance.

We hope that the articles gathered in this issue, which deal with various aspects of aging and old age, show that medical and social care should complement and balance each other, which is the basis of proper care for seniors.

As thematic editor, I would like to thank the editorial team for entrusting me with this responsible task, and the P.T. Reviewers for their substantive commitment and time. I hope all readers will enjoy these inspiring essays.

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