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Health Problems of the Aged

Dr. Geeta Rani Arora

Abstract: An over view of health problems of the aged and the role of homeopathy in prevention and treatment

Geriatrics derived from Greek word 'Geron' means old man and 'Iatraia' means the treatment of disease.

Our aim is not to cure old age but help and prolong old age.

Why Geriatrics Care is important?

1. Geriatrics care matters: The vast majority of outcome studies show that good geriatric care results in increased quality of life, lower morbidity and lower mortality versus traditional medical care.
2. Huge demand: A 1996 alliance for Ageing Research study shows that there is a shortage of more than 13,000 doctors who are needed to care for geriatric patients. By 2030, the estimate is that 33,000 geriatricians will be needed to care for the elderly.
3. Emotionally fulfilling: Geriatricians have more satisfying interactions with patients. Working with elderly means that you have more time to see patients because managed care expects you to need the extra time. This allows for an incredible patient-physician relationship to develop.
4. Intellectually stimulating: Geriatrics is a very intellectually stimulating specialty. Almost every older patient that you take care of will have several concurrent problems. A "simple" case is rare. One has yet to know how to treat and manage each of these problems, but also the interactions amongst them.
5. A multi-disciplinary, team-based approach allows you to look at all aspects of the patient: working for this strata will often involve working closely with nurses, social workers, psycholo-

gists, pharmacists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and others. This means that we as a team can do a lot for the "whole" patient rather than focusing only on the medical problem.

Health Problems of the Aged

Health problems of the aged can be due to

- I. Problems due to Ageing.
- II. Problems due to long term illness.
- III. Psychological illness.

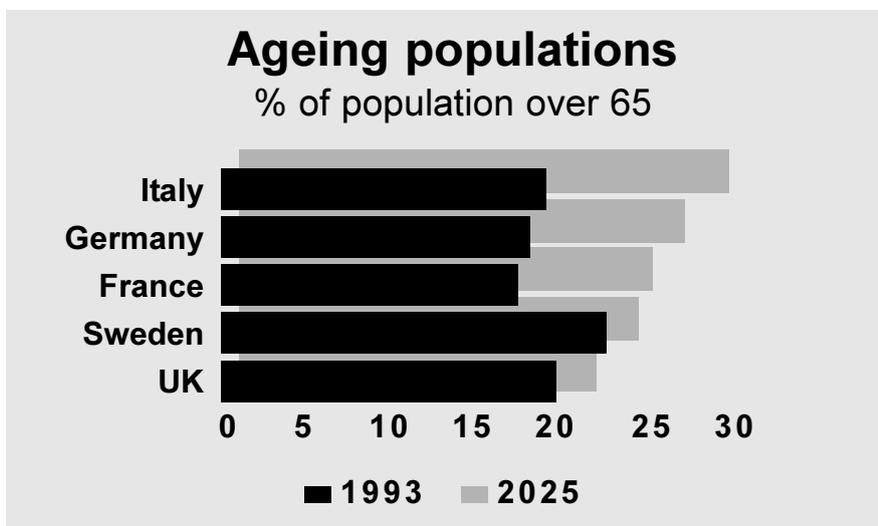
Number of people with pathological changes in terms of fatal illness are less as compared to suffering from functional changes and simply changes due to age.

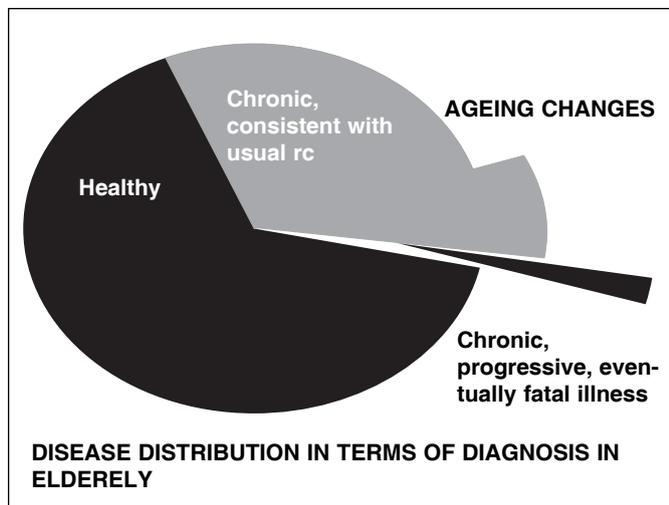
- I. Problems Due to Ageing:
 - Visual impairments: Senile cataract, Glaucoma
 - Locomotor disorders: Bony changes affecting mobility
 - Hearing loss: Due to nerve deafness
 - Nervous System: Failure of special senses
 - Genito urinary disorders
 - Neurological disorders

II. Problems Due to Long term Illness:

Under this category there are chronic diseases which are more frequent among the older people.

1. Degenerative diseases of heart





- and blood vessels
2. Malignancy: Incidence of cancer rises after age of 40 years
 - (a) e.g. Ca prostate (after age of 65 years)
 3. Accidents: Pathological fractures
Bones become fragile due to osteoporosis
 4. Diabetes: It is lifestyle disorder which due to faulty carbohydrate metabolism. NIDDM is on rise in India due to lifestyle pattern changes
 5. Diseases of Locomotor System: A wide range of articular and non articular disorders affecting the aged e.g. Fibrositis, Aysitis Neuritis, Gout, Rheumatoid arthritis, Spondylitis of spine. These conditions cause discomfort and disability
 6. Respiratory disorders: Respiratory illness like chronic bronchitis asthma and emphysema.
 7. Genitourinary system: Enlargement of prostate, dysuria nocturia frequent urgency of micturition.
- III. Psychological Illness
1. Mental Changes: Impaired Memory, rigidity of outlook, dislike of change. Reduced income leads to fall of living standards of elderly.
 2. Sexual problems: Cessation of

reproduction by woman and diminution of sexual activity in men may cause physical and emotional disturbances.

Person may land-up into irritability, jealousy and feeling of worthlessness may occur.

3. Emotional Problems are result of social mal-adjustment: The degree of adapt to the fact of ageing is not very easy. Failure to adapt can result in bitterness, inner withdrawal, depression, weariness of life and even suicide.

Why Homeopathy should be Considered for Old Age Group

Homeopathy a holistic science: Homeopathy is the revolutionary, natural medical science and a system of medicine, which is gentle and effective. The homeopathic remedies are prepared from natural substances to precise standards and work by stimulating the body's own healing power. Homeopathy is holistic science, which considers all the problems of the person together both at the mental and physical level. A number of diseases, which are faced by this group, can be treated with homeopathy without side-effects if given rightly and that too without making the person dependent on it.

In old age there are a lot of conditions which require surgical intervention but same cannot be done because patient's condition does not allow, in those cases also homeopa-

thy can be of help as a palliative. Homeopathy is one such branch of therapeutics, which believes in treating the patient who is diseased and not merely diseased parts of the patients.

Scope of Homeopathy in Geriatric Care

Homeopathy in Rheumatology: Despite increased awareness about the nature of diseases, many diseases continue on their relentless course. This brings about severe disabilities and finally produces a myriad of irreversible changes with painful terminal phases.

In this case, integrated care provides an excellent response.

What are the faculties that work to deliver this cure?

Rational homeopathic therapeutics brings about good control over the autoimmune activity of the rheumatological process.

An orthopedic surgeon helps in evaluation as well as in deciding specific accessories. He carries out corrective surgery whenever necessary.

Physiotherapy helps a lot in mobilisation and improves functional capacity to a great extent. It is an important measure at various stages of the disease.

Yoga plays a much more holistic role in the treatment of rheumatological disorders. The asanas have a positive impact on the body as well as on mind.

There has to be a co-ordination among homeopaths, orthopedic surgeons, rheumatologist, physiotherapists and yoga teachers to allow inte-

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Some Age Related Changes and their Consequences

ORGAN / SYSTEM	AGE RELATED PHYSIOLOGIC CHANGE	CONSEQUENCE OF AGE RELATED CHANGE	CONSEQUENCE OF DISEASE
General	↑ Body fat	↑ Volume of distribution of fat soluble drugs	Obesity
	↓ Total body water	↓ Volume of distribution for water soluble drugs	Anorexia
Eyes/	Presbyopia	↓ Accomodation	Blindness
	Lens opacification	↓ Accomodation ↑ Susceptibility to glare need for increased illumination	
Ears	↓ High frequency acuity	Difficulty discriminating words if background sound is present	Deafness
Endocrine	Impaired glucose homeostasis ADH ↓renin ↓ aldosterone ↓ testosterone ↓ Vitamin D absorption	↑ Glucose level in response to acute illness Osteopenia	Diabetes Mellitus Na + K+ Impotence Osteomalacia
Respiratory	Lung elasticity and chest wall stiffness	Ventilation/Perfusion mismatch and ↓ po ₂	Dyspnea, hypoxia
Cardiovascular	↓ Arterial compliance and ↑ systolic BP	Hypotensive response to ↑ HR ↓ Cardiac output	Syncope Heart failure
Gastrointestinal	↓ Hepatic function ↓ Gastric acidity ↓ Colonic motility ↓ Anorectal function	Delayed metabolism of some drugs ↓ Ca+absorption on empty stomach Constipation	Cirrhosis Osteoporosis, B12 Deficiency Fecal impaction Fecal incontinence
Hematologic / Immune system	Bone marrow reserve ↓ Tcell function ↑ Autoantibodies	False -tive PPD reaction False+tive rheumatoid factor, antinuclear antibody	Autoimmune disease
Renal	↓ GFR ↓ Urinary concentration / dilution	Impaired excretion of some drugs Delayed response to salt or fluid restriction/overload; nocturia	↑ Serum Creatinine ↓ ↑ Na+
Genitourinary	Vaginal urethral mucosal atrophy Prostate enlargement	Dyspareunia, bacteriuria ↑ Residual urine volume	Symptomatic UTI Urinary incontinence Urinary retention
Musculoskeletal	↓ Lean body mass, muscle ↓ Bone density	Osteopenia	Functional impairment Hip fracture
Nervous system	Brain atrophy ↓ Brain catechol synthesis ↓ Brain dopaminergic synthesis ↓ Stage 4 sleep	Benign senscent forgetfulness Stiffer gait ↑ Body sway. Early wakening, insomnia	Dementia, Delirium, Depression Parkinsonism Falls Sleep apnea

grated holistic care of such patients with scientific evaluation. Few medicines know for arthritis are Bryonia,

Colchicum and Rhus tox etc.

GIT: One of the common prob-

lems of elderly is constipation for which they become dependent on medications and laxatives.

Homeopathic medicine can be given to correct the bowel movement along with proper advice to the patient regarding diet and physical activity. Medicines like Nux vomica, Opium Plumbum metallicum are helpful for these conditions.

Homeopathy in Cancer: Drugs are available for cancer which act as a palliative e.g. in Ca stomach, Ca Cervix, Ca mouth. There are drugs for BPH that gives symptomatic relief and stops further progress of malignancy. Drugs can also be used for some cases in care of terminally ill patients like Carbolic acid, Condurango, Conium, Kreosote, etc.

Bed Sores: Pressure sores or bedsores are a fairly common problem in the elderly owing to many factors such as incapacitation due to some illness. How about treating bedsores before they become a permanent disease in you? Prevent the development of pressure sores, as it is much easier to prevent any disease than cure. Homeopathic remedies act miraculously in curing the sores that have already developed. Useful remedies are Arnica, Echinecea, Lachesis, Sulphuric acid.

Alzheimer's Disease (AD): Mother Nature has blessed mankind amongst all the entities on the earth with an extraordinary quality of logical and rational thinking. Unfortunately, the entire system of an individual becomes handicapped as the same brain starts deteriorating. As many as 2-4% of all people of 65 years of age and older have Alzheimer's.

Treatment: When we discuss the role of medicine for certain diseases, we probably do not talk of the 'cure' in real sense, but more of 'control' and 'relief'. AD is one such condi-

tion, where homeopathy has following role to play: To control the disease process whereby further deterioration of the brain damage is helped to certain extent. To improve to an extent some of the symptoms: communication, failing memory, anxiety, restlessness, etc.

Many of the problems associated with dementia such as restlessness, depression, and agitation can be treated effectively and gently with homeopathy. It may also be possible, especially in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, to improve someone's memory with homeopathic medication. Timely administered homeopathy medicines can prevent further progress of disease.

Homeopathy undertakes study of each Alzheimer's as separate entity and does in-depth evaluation of the disease as well as patient as a person. It should be noted that there is no single specific remedy for all the cases of Alzheimer's. The exact treatment is determined only on in depth evaluation of individual case.

Anxiety disorders in the elderly: Aging brings with it a higher prevalence of certain medical conditions, realistic concern about physical problems, and a higher use of prescribed medications.

As a result, separating a medical condition from physical symptoms of an anxiety disorder is more complicated in the older adult. Both medication and psychosocial therapies are used to treat anxiety in older persons. Homeopathy has vast scope in these areas as Homeopathic remedies act on mind, emotions and body. Correct homeopathic remedy when prescribed on the basis of constitution of the person depending on their sensitivity, temperament and

disposition of the person will correct the internal imbalance and reduce the anxiety levels.

Depression in Elderly: Depression is one of the major problems which is seen in elderly. This could be secondary:

- To the illness which has restricted their mobility
- Lifestyle disorders which need alternation in their routine, diet etc
- Financial constraints as the source of income is usually not there
- Many times these people have to live alone as children abandon them or due to other reasons are living separately

Homeopathic drugs can be given to these patients which act the dynamic level will not only correct depression but also decrease his tendency of this kind of reaction along with relieving him of his physical ailments and thus help him live a better life. Here psychological help in form of treatment as well as evaluation of patient's prognosis can be done simultaneously. Few known remedies are Kali phos, Natrum muriaticum, Lachesis, Stramonium etc. Tranquil is one of the products of SBL which is effective for depression and anxiety states.

Let our loved ones live long without getting old !!!

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