

World Health Day 2012: 'Ageing and Health: Good health adds life to years'

World Health Day 2012 Scientific Committee, Ministry of Health, Brunei Darussalam



Caricatures by Dk Malina (Senior occupational therapist at RIPAS hospital)

Facts about ageing

The number of people today aged 60 and over has doubled since 1980.

The number of people aged 80 years will almost quadruple to 395 million between now and 2050.

Within the next five years, the number of adults aged 65 and over will outnumber children under the age of 5.

By 2050, these older adults will outnumber all children under the age of 14.

The majority of older people live in low- or middle-income countries. By 2050, this number will have increased to 80%.

World Health Day is celebrated annually on 7th April to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1948. It is a global campaign, inviting everyone – from global leaders to the public in all countries – to focus on a single health challenge with global impact.

The theme of World Health Day in 2012 is 'Ageing and Health' with a slogan that reads 'Good health adds life to years'. The focus is how good health throughout life can help older men and women lead full and productive lives and be a resource for their families and communities. Ageing concerns each and every one of us – whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor – no matter where we live.

The general approach suggested by the WHO was to:

: *Take action to create societies which appreciate and acknowledge older people as valued resources and enable them to participate fully*

: *Help protect and improve health as we age.*

Determinants of healthy ageing

- **Healthy ageing is linked to health in earlier stages of life.** Under-nutrition in the womb, for example, may increase the risk of disease in adult life, such as circulatory diseases and diabetes mellitus. Respiratory infections in childhood may increase the risk of chronic bronchitis in adult life. Obese, or overweight, adolescents run the risk of developing chronic diseases, such as diabetes, circulatory disease, cancer, respiratory and musculo-skeletal disorders, in adult life.

- **Yet, how well we age depends on many factors.** The functional capacity of an individual's biological system increases during the first years of life, reaches its peak in early adulthood and naturally declines thereafter. The rate of decline is determined, at least in part, by our behaviours and exposures across the whole life course. These include what we eat, how physically active we are and our exposure to health risks such as those caused by smoking, harmful consumption of

alcohol, or exposure to toxic substances.

Demographic changes are accompanied by new challenges

- ***Even in poor countries, older people die of non-communicable diseases*** such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes mellitus, rather than from infectious and parasitic diseases. In addition, older people often have several health problems at the same time, such as diabetes and heart disease.

- ***The number of people living with disability is increasing due to population ageing and because of the greater risk of chronic health problems in older age.*** For example, about 65% of all people who are visually impaired are aged 50 and older, with this age group comprising about 20% of the world's population. With an increasing elderly population in many countries, more people will be at risk of age-related visual impairment.

- ***Globally, many older people are at risk of maltreatment.*** Around 4-6% of older people in developed countries having experienced some form of maltreatment at home. Abusive acts in institutions include physically restraining patients, depriving them of dignity (by for instance leaving them in soiled clothes) and intentionally providing insufficient care (such as allowing them to develop pressure sores). The maltreatment of older people can lead to serious physical injuries and long-term psychological consequences.

- ***The need for long-term care is rising.*** The number of older people who are no longer able to look after themselves in developing countries is forecast to quadruple by 2050. Many of the very old lose their ability to live independently because of limited mobility, frailty or other physical or mental health problems. Many require some form of long-term care, which can include home nursing, community care and assisted living, residential care and long stays in hospitals.

- ***Worldwide, there will be a dramatic increase in the number of people with dementias such***

as Alzheimer's disease, as people live longer.

The risk of dementia rises sharply with age with an estimated 25-30% of people aged 85 or older having some degree of cognitive decline. Older people with dementia in low- and middle-income countries generally do not have access to the affordable long-term care their condition may warrant. Often their families do not often have publicly funded support to help with care at home.

- ***In emergency situations, older people can be especially vulnerable.*** When communities are displaced by natural disasters or armed conflict, older people may be unable to flee or travel long distances and may be left behind. Yet, in many situations they can also be a valuable resource for their communities as well as for the humanitarian aid process when they are involved as community leaders.

Fighting stereotypes

We all generally value and respect the older people we love or know well. But our attitudes to other older people within the broader community can be different. In many traditional societies, older people are respected as 'elders'. However, in other societies, older women and men may be less respected. The marginalisation can be structural, for example enforced retirement ages, or informal, such as older people being viewed as less energetic and less valuable to a potential employer. These attitudes are examples of 'ageism' — the stereotyping of, and discrimination against, individuals or groups because of their age. Ageist attitudes can portray older people as frail, 'past their sell-by date', unable to work, physically weak, mentally slow, disabled or helpless. Ageism serves as a social divider between young and old.

These stereotypes can prevent older men and women from fully participating in social, political, economic, cultural, spiritual, civic and other activities. Younger people may also influence these decisions in the attitudes they convey to older people, or even by building barriers to their participation.

We can escape this vicious cycle by breaking down stereotypes and changing our attitudes about older people.

The key messages proposed by the WHO for this World Health Day are:

- : *Older people are a valuable resource for their societies and should feel valued.*
- : *Good health throughout life helps us make the most of the positive aspects of ageing.*
- : *Societies who take care of their older populations, and support their active participation in daily life, will be better prepared to cope with the changing world.*

Calls to action

Good health in older age can be achieved by:

- : *Promoting health across the life-course.*
- : *Creating age-friendly environments that foster the health and participation of older people.*
- : *Providing access to basic primary health care, long-term care and palliative care.*
- : *Acknowledging the value of older people and help them participate fully in family and community life.*

Activities of Ministry of Health of Brunei Darussalam to mark World Health Day 2012

The launch of World Health Day was held on 7th April 2012. The guest of honour was the Honourable Minister of Health of Brunei, Pehin Orang Kaya Johan Pahlawan Dato Seri Setia Awang Hj Adanan Bin Begawan Pehin Siraja Khatib Dato Seri Setia Hj Md Yusof. In addition to the Minister of Health's Speech outlining the Ministry's commitment to

promoting healthy ageing, there was also a public forum consisting of short talks from a Consultant Geriatrician, a representative from the Community Development Department, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, a religious official and an exemplary healthy elder followed by a question-and-answer session.

There was also a health exhibition targeted at older persons following the opening ceremony. This included general health screening and a number of other exhibits/screening that focused on continence, memory loss, depression and falls, the so-called 'four giants' of geriatrics as termed by the WHO. This format was subsequently replicated in the Belait and Tutong Districts in May and June.

Later this year a workshop on dementia is planned for healthcare professionals as well as the commencement of a strategy-building process for a national services framework for older people for Brunei Darussalam. It is hoped that this approach for World Health Day 2012 i.e. through health promotion and addressing key issues of healthcare within primary and secondary healthcare provision will foster a positive and healthy environment for older people.

Note: Prepared by the Scientific Committee, World Health Day 2012, Ministry of Health, Brunei Darussalam based on facts provided in the World Health Day 2012 Toolkit. ¹

REFERENCE

- 1:** World Health Day 2012 - Toolkit for event organisers. Available from <http://www.who.int/world-health-day/2012/toolkit/introduction/en/index.html> (Accessed 9th March 2012).
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