

Geriatric Health in Saudi Arabia, A Review

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ABSTRACT

Geriatric health is not separate from general population health, but maintaining a good health is difficult and different in old age. In order to achieve healthy geriatric community, it is necessary to know few aspects of old age. The design and implementation of comprehensive preventive health protocols for elders presents the medical profession with many challenges. Although a specific protocol must be modified to meet the unique needs of the individual patient, there are certain factors common to elderly segment of the population that may influence these protocols.

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People worldwide are living longer than past time. Today most people can expect to live into their sixties and beyond. Every country in the world is facing growth in both the size and the proportion of older persons in the population.

By 2030, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or over. At this time the share of the population aged 60 years and over will increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion. By 2050, the world's population of people aged 60 years and older will be double (2.1 billion). This is the success story of increasing life expectancy occurred in the 20th century [1,2].

Ageing results from the impact of the accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time. This leads to a gradual decrease in physical and mental capacity, a growing risk of disease and ultimately death [1]. Both physical and mental well-being is important to any human being.

As people age increase, they are more likely to experience several health conditions at the same time like back and neck pain, hearing loss and osteoarthritis, dental problems, diabetes, depression and dementia [1].

Regarding the social supports, a direct association between social support and mental health [3].

The consequences of the growing elderly population are many, including: rising total health care costs, the growing needs for long-term care services and the need for expert and focused health care services. These increasing in health care costs will fall on older persons, families, and society generally.

In Saudi Arabia, the demographic trends are changing. The kingdom follows the global increase in aging population. This is mainly due to an increase in life expectancy, high birth rates

in the last four decades, and a recent decline in the fertility rate. The life expectancy has improved from 64.4 years in the 1980s to 74.3 years in the 2000s according to World Bank report in 2014 [4].

Looking forward, the health care system is unprepared to provide the acceptable medical and support services needed for these people and there is lacking in investment in keeping people healthy into their highest ages. Also, one of the main challenges in advancing the elderly health is the huge gap in the scientific literature about their characteristics, health status, and needs. This information is central in developing evidence-based national health policies and public intervention programs in the future [4].

The ministry of health has created "The Home Care Program for Older Adults" to provide some medical services that can be offered at home without jeopardizing the quality of service. Such service has been proven to improve patients' satisfaction, reduce staff burnout, and reduce hospitalization rate for ambulatory care-sensitive condition [5]. The services were provided by a team of physicians, nurses, social workers, and medical educators. And this program needs improvement and implementation in most of the cities.

However, despite the ministry of health efforts, interdisciplinary work between the stakeholders including leaders of Saudi healthcare system, healthcare providers, researchers, public health specialists, policy developers and public health advocates, medical educators and educational institutes, Ministry of human resources and Social Development, Social Security and Retirement Agency as well as social and community organizations is needed to achieve the goal of successful active aging. The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office has proposed fourteen steps for modeling national policy for the elderly [1]. Such a framework should be discussed to in developing policy and programs for geriatric health policies.

Therefore, in response to the special challenges and requirements of the aging population, all stakeholders should work together to develop informed national evidence-based policies, programs, and interventions for healthy aging in order to maintain geriatric independent, autonomous and active as possible so they can contribute productively to the society [4].

This study is concurrent with WHO regarding Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) seeks to reduce health inequities and improve the lives of older people, their families and communities through collective action in four areas: changing how we think, feel and act towards age and ageism; developing communities in ways that foster the abilities of older people; delivering person-centered integrated care and primary health services responsive to older people; and providing older people who need it with access to quality long-term care [1].

Recommendations

- Improvement of programs that increase information about importance of geriatric health.
- Ensure the elder people have access to healthy food and clean water.
- Caring for mental health as physical health and stay active as possible.
- Involving the geriatric people in the social activities.
- Continues review and improvement of public health programs.

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