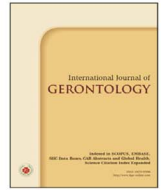




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Preface

Meeting the Dual Challenge: Aging Individuals and Aging Societies

There's a new development in Gerontology & Geriatrics. Traditionally, the field has focused on understanding normal and abnormal aging and enhancing the physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of older persons. However, as longevity has continued to advance, a wave of demographic transformation has swept across the globe, turning many countries – rich and poor – into aging societies in which there are more old people than young. As a result, our mandate as gerontologists and geriatricians has grown, broadening the disciplines and tools we need to bring to bear in our work, strengthening our relations with population science, epidemiology, demography, public health and public policy and economics.

Increasingly, we've recognized how vital it has become to consider the critical role of context in our assessments; this incorporates the degree to which the social, economic, security, access to health care and other aspects of peoples' environment, which have a crucial influence on their ability, and likelihood, to age successfully. In this regard, research demonstrates that the critical infrastructural elements of their society – including education, housing, work and retirement, health care and the built environment – are not designed to support a population with the developing age distribution.

This broader gerontologic mandate is reflected in the 14 articles assembled into this special issue of the International Journal of Gerontology, published in conjunction with the Congress of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics's Asia-Oceania Region (IAGG-AOR). Topics covered in this volume range from traditional areas such as basic science, clinical studies of elders aging successfully and those with dementia, health promotion, falls preven-

tion, and rehabilitation, to broader issues such as traffic accident prevention and the legal facets of access to safe, affordable housing.

As we examine these new developments in societal aging, it is critical to keep several core issues in mind:

We must be aware of the sinister and counterproductive effects of **AGEISM**, which is rampant at all levels of many societies and must be countered if we are to develop genuinely cohesive societies, in which older persons can age successfully and to which they can make important and valuable contributions.

We must take a **LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE**, recognizing we need to study a society as a whole, not merely one age group. This perspective enables a long-term approach to managing the precursors of much of the disease and disability we see in old age.

We must identify programs and policies which foster **ENGAGEMENT** of older persons in society, whether through work for pay or volunteering. Both yield significant overall economic and productivity benefits, as well as fostering the physical and mental well-being of engaged older persons.

These core issues – and many others – will attract significant attention from the attendees of the IAGG-AOR Congress; as well as being a central component of our field as we advance the dual agenda of advancing the well-being of older persons, while facilitating effective adaptation of societies to their aging.

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