
AN ASSESSMENT OF COMMON HEALTH CHALLENGES OF ELDERLY AND MODERN REMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

Inevitably, it has been observed that as people become aged, they are more likely to experience health challenge at the same time. Although some of the variations in older people's health are genetic, most of them are due to people's physical and social environments and live styles, as well as their personal characteristics. Older age is also characterized by the emergence of several complex health states commonly called geriatric syndromes. Sequel to the above facts a study was conducted to examine common health challenges of elderly and the modern remedies. The findings made revealed that health challenges that are common in older age include hearing loss, cataracts and refractive errors, back/neck pain as well as osteoarthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, depression and dementia. The findings also revealed various modern remedies to the specified age-related challenges. For hearing loss, modern remedies were said to be the use of hearing aid(s), or assistive devices, such as telephone amplifiers or technology that converts speech to text. Also eyeglasses were the simplest and safest way to correct refractive errors. Besides that, PurXcel was said to be a useful product for reversal of all kinds of eye problems, such as: cataracts, glaucoma, myopia, and far-sightedness. As for back/neck pain and osteoarthritis, the modern remedies include exercise, rest and joint care, pain relief, weight control, medicines, surgery, and complementary treatment approaches. One of the recommendations made in the study was that people should observe good life styles such as good eating habit, involvement in physical activities, observation of adequate sleep, avoidance of stress and harmful substances before and during old age in order to avert future health challenges.

KEYWORDS: Common Health Challenges, Modern Remedies and Elderly

Introduction

The prevalence of non-communicable diseases has been increasing among the elderly. Cardiovascular diseases, vision problems, cataracts, refractive errors, diabetes, depression, and arthritis have an important place among the common health problems encountered by the elderly. According to Ylmaz and Olak (2018), the prevalence of chronic diseases in the elderly increases drug utilization. The presence of multiple chronic diseases in the elderly causes

polypharmacy. The increase in drug utilization may also result in other significant health problems. Aging people live complicated lives; as a result, they seek and make demands on healthcare delivery and facilities in order to protect their health and improve their quality of life. These demands are aimed at protecting physical, bodily, and mental health.

Preventing disease development in old age through primary protection, early diagnosis, and effective treatment methods, as well as taking precautions and maintaining disability and life quality, are critical for healthy and successful aging. Precautions such as adequate and balanced nutrition, sufficient physical activity, and reducing tobacco and alcohol use may protect against geriatric syndromes and non-communicable diseases affecting the elderly. According to López-Otín et al. (2013), cellular damage caused by molecular degeneration in old age is a major risk factor for major human pathologies such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and neurodegenerative diseases. Sometimes, older people are mistakenly thought to be confused, unresponsive, or uncooperative because they don't hear well. Lethbridge-Cejku (2004) asserted that hearing loss is the third most common chronic condition reported by elderly people. Also, age-related cataracts are observed to be the leading cause of blindness in the world and one of the most common etiologies of visual impairment among the elderly. Moreover, one of the most common syndromes encountered in the elderly is back and neck pain. Neck pain (NP) and back pain (BP) are also among the most common challenges encountered by the elderly.

Concept of Elderly

Old age is a natural process that starts with intrauterine life, continues until death, and is caused by irreversible degeneration of cells and systems (Zel et al., 2014). Old age is not a pathological process and consists of physiological, psychological, sociological, and chronological changes (Karagülle, 2008; Hoca, Türker, 2017; Yldz et al., 2017). Physiological old age is defined as structural and functional losses; psychological old age is defined as declines in perception, learning, and problem-solving ability; and sociological old age is defined as declines and losses in the values assigned to individuals by society (Tekin and Kara, 2018). According to the World Health Organization (2018), old age denotes the decrease in an individual's environmental compliance ability outside of her/his control and chronologically defines individuals aged 65 years and older.

According to the WHO (2018), chronological age is classified as follows: 65–75 years are considered young old ages and a transition period from working life to retirement; 75–85 years are considered advanced old ages and a period when functional losses are observed; and 85 years or older are considered very advanced old ages and a period requiring special care and support (Beğler and Yavuzer, 2012). Old age is also associated with fragility. According to Wehbe et al. (2013) and Forman and Alexander (2016), fragility is a geriatric syndrome that is characterized by negative health outcomes such as decreased physiological reserves and body mass index, physical deformity, slowness, weakness, lower level of physical activity, stress intolerance, burnout, and may result in death. Sick and fragile elderly individuals become more sensitive to geriatric syndromes (Fried et al., 2001; Polidoro et al., 2011). The rate of fragility is 20–30% in individuals aged 75 and older and 30–45% in individuals aged 85 and older (Schoufour et al., 2014).

Concept and Cases of Health Challenges

A number of health challenges are common around the globe. The disease is one of the most common. According to Shah (2014), 36 million people die each year from non-communicable (i.e., not contagious) diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic lung disease. Among communicable diseases, both viral and bacterial, AIDS/HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria are the most common, causing millions of deaths every year. Another health issue that causes death or contributes to other health problems is malnutrition, especially among children. One of the groups that malnutrition affects most is young children. Approximately 7.5 million children under the age of 5 die from malnutrition, usually brought on by not having the money to find or make food. Bodily injuries are also a common health challenge worldwide. These injuries, including bone fractures and burns, can reduce a person's quality of life or can cause fatalities, including infections that resulted from the injury (or the severity of injury in general).

Also, mental illness is another health challenge. Mental illness is described as the spectrum of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral conditions that interfere with social and emotional well-being and the lives and productivity of people. Having a mental illness can seriously impair, temporarily or permanently, the mental functioning of a person. According to WHO (2005), mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. Bos et al. (2016) averred that mental health is not just the absence of mental illness. In addition to health care interventions and a person's surroundings, a number of other factors are known to influence the health status of individuals. These are referred to as the "determinants of health", which include the individual's background, lifestyle, economic status, social conditions, and spirituality.

Types of Common Health Challenges Encountered by the Elderly

According to Devoted Guardians (2021), old age is a unique life phase characterized by various health changes, as well as cognitive, emotional, social, and financial changes. Most people consider old age to be a problem-ridden stage of life, with aging problems usually occurring after 65.

Below are the common health challenges encountered by the elderly

❖ **Hearing Loss Challenge:** Older people who can't hear well may become depressed, or they may withdraw from others because they feel frustrated or embarrassed about not understanding what is being said. Sometimes, older people are mistakenly thought to be confused, unresponsive, or uncooperative because they don't hear well. According to Lethbridge-Cejku (2004), hearing loss is the third most common chronic condition reported by elderly people. Hearing sensitivity declines gradually and progressively with aging. Perhaps the most important consequence of the decline in hearing sensitivity with aging is difficulty understanding speech. Difficulties arise when elderly listeners must follow conversational speech in adverse listening conditions, including noise and reverberation. With age, older adults (OA) experience increasing difficulty with cognitive, physical, and sensory functioning, which in turn affects social functioning and impacts independent living. With age, hearing is impacted by both peripheral and cognitive changes, such as elevated thresholds for tone detection in the high frequency range (i.e., 4,000 Hz and 8,000 Hz) and suprathreshold

difficulties when auditory stimuli are presented in multispeaker contexts and in environments with background noise (Schneider et al., 2010). Epidemiological work demonstrates that poorer hearing acuity is associated with an increased risk of falling (Lin & Ferrucci, 2012; Viljanen et al., 2009). Apparently, Li & Lindenberger (2002) averred that with age, both auditory functioning and balance increasingly rely on cognitive resources to compensate for peripheral changes, suggesting that both domains compete for common cognitive resources.

Types of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss comes in many forms. It can range from a mild loss, in which a person misses certain high-pitched sounds, such as the voices of women and children, to a total loss of hearing.

There are two general categories of hearing loss:

- ✚ Sensorineural hearing loss occurs when there is damage to the inner ear or the auditory nerve. This type of hearing loss is usually permanent.
- ✚ Conductive hearing loss occurs when sound waves cannot reach the inner ear. The cause may be earwax buildup, fluid, or a punctured eardrum. Medical treatment or surgery can usually restore conductive hearing loss.

Age-related hearing loss occurs gradually over time. Various changes in the inner ear can cause the condition. These include: changes in the structures of the inner ear, changes in blood flow to the ear, impairment in the nerves responsible for hearing, changes in the way that the brain processes speech and sound, and damage to the tiny hairs in the ear that are responsible for transmitting sound to the brain.

Age-related hearing loss can also be caused by other issues, including:

- diabetes
- poor circulation
- exposure to loud noises
- use of certain medications
- family history of hearing loss
- smoking

In general, people who have hearing loss may experience any or all of the following:

- Difficulty understanding everyday conversation
- A feeling of being able to hear but not understand
- Having to turn up the TV or radio
- Asking others to repeat often
- You no longer hear birdsong, or hear it rarely

- Avoidance of social situations that were once enjoyable
- A sense of exhaustion after a day of listening to other people
- Increased difficulty communicating in noisy situations like restaurants, lively family gatherings, in the car or in group meetings
- Tinnitus, or ringing and/or buzzing sounds in the ears

❖ **Cataracts and Refractive Challenge:** Age-related cataracts are the leading cause of blindness in the world and one of the most common etiologies of visual impairment among the elderly. There are three main types of cataracts: nuclear, cortical, and subcapsular. Age is the strongest predictor of cataract development. Other major risk factors include a family history of cataracts, diabetes, smoking, obesity, poor nutrition, lower socioeconomic status, and alcohol use. Consequences can include loss of driving privileges, inability to read or watch television, inability to participate in social activities, and an increased risk of falls.

❖ **Back/Neck Pain Challenge:** Back and neck pain is a multidimensional, complex, and unpleasant feeling that occurs as a result of tissue damage, originates from nociceptive and neuropathic signals, predicts possible physiological dangers, and is affected by psychosocial factors and the person's past experiences (Belfer 2013; Öztürk Birge and Mollaoğlu, 2018). One of the most common syndromes encountered in the elderly is back and neck pain. Neck pain (NP) and back pain (BP) are also among the most common challenges encountered by the elderly. Back and neck pain affect the physical health status of people over 65 years of age, and both back and neck pain are associated with a long list of other health problems and decreased overall physical function. At the same time, depression has also been reported as a predictor of subsequent back pain among elderly adults over a follow-up of 12 months. When individuals exceed the age of 60, the incidence of pain doubles and increases every ten years (Miaskowski 2000). It has been determined that pain prevalence in the elderly varies between 88.5% and 99.7% (Blyth et al., 2001; Gökkaya et al., 2012).

Modern Remedies to Health Challenges

Since prehistoric times, humans have used natural products, such as plants, animals, microorganisms, and marine organisms, in medicine to alleviate and treat diseases of all kinds. According to fossil records, the human use of plants as medicines may be traced back at least 60,000 years (Shi et al. 2010). The use of natural products as medicines must, of course, have presented a tremendous challenge to early humans. When seeking food, early humans often consumed poisonous plants, which led to vomiting, diarrhea, comas, or other toxic reactions—perhaps even death. However, in this way, early humans were able to develop knowledge about edible materials and natural medicines (Gao et al., 2007). Subsequently, humans invented fire, learned how to make alcohol, developed religions, made technological breakthroughs, and learned how to develop new drugs.

Western medicine was introduced in the sixteenth century, but it did not undergo any development until the nineteenth century. Before that, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) was the dominant form of medical care in the country (Dong, 2013). However, it is notable that there is an increasing convergence between TCM and modern medicine. With the development of modern technology, it has become possible to determine the pharmacology and mechanisms of

action of many Chinese herbs, and TCM has become comprehensible in terms of modern medicine (Zhang and Li 2011; Chan et al. 2012). With advances in the theoretical background, therapeutic principles, associated technologies, and understanding of the life sciences, a clearer understanding of the active compounds of TCM has become possible (Dong, 2013). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the era of "modern" drugs began.

The development of new drugs relying purely on modern technology appears to be reaching something of a limit. In developing new drugs, the pharmaceutical industry has tended to adopt high-throughput synthesis and combinatorial chemistry-based drug development since the 1980s. According to Ngo et al. (2013), over the past dozen years, increasing attention has accordingly been paid to natural products in the search for novel drugs in combination with new technology, such as high-throughput selection. Natural products, which have evolved over millions of years, have a unique chemical diversity that results in diversity in their biological activities and drug-like properties. Those products have become one of the most important resources for developing new lead compounds and scaffolds. Natural products will undergo continual use toward meeting the urgent need to develop effective drugs, and they will play a leading role in the discovery of drugs for treating human diseases, especially critical diseases.

Modern Treatments for Common Health Challenges Encountered by the Elderly

Treatments for Hearing Loss

Hearing aids are the most common treatment for hearing loss. Some types of hearing loss, especially conductive types, can be medically or surgically corrected, but others cannot. The most common treatment for sensorineural hearing loss is properly fitted hearing aids. Hearing loss is generally not curable, but it is almost always treatable. Finding the right treatment is a joint venture between you and your hearing care professional, and if done properly, takes into consideration the following factors: type of hearing loss, severity of hearing loss, cause, if known, your lifestyle, your age, your communication needs, your cosmetic preferences, and your budget.

Some types of hearing loss, especially conductive types, can be medically or surgically corrected, but others cannot. The most common treatment for sensorineural hearing loss is properly fitted hearing aids. Hearing aids are widely available in a range of styles, colors, sizes, technology levels, and price points. Hearing aids do more than just help you hear—hearing aids will make you healthier overall, too. Increasingly, cochlear implants are a good treatment option for people who aren't helped enough by hearing aids.

Treatment for Cataracts and Refractive

When your prescription glasses can't clear your vision, the only effective treatment for cataracts is surgery. Cataract surgery involves removing the clouded lens and replacing it with a clear artificial lens. The artificial lens, called an intraocular lens, is positioned in the same place as your natural lens. It remains a permanent part of your eye. In developed nations, e.g., in the United States and London, surgery is the definitive treatment for cataracts and refractive errors: Phacoemulsification and implantation of a posterior chamber intraocular lens is the most common method used for managing cataracts. In industrialised and underdeveloped nations, the use of eyeglasses and herbal substances can help manage cataracts and refractive problems in the elderly.

Treatment for Back and Neck Pain

If you experience acute back or neck pain, it may simply improve with some rest. Over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, may also help with the discomfort. You should try to move gently during this period, so that you will not become stiff and lose mobility. If you have chronic pain in your back and neck, you should try several remedies that may be helpful before seeking surgical options. These include:

- Hot or cold packs (under your health care provider's instructions)
- Specific exercises to strengthen muscles and ease pain, such as stretching and flexing. Your health care provider can provide and demonstrate these exercises.
- Aerobic exercise may be permitted and can help with your overall fitness and strength
- Certain anti-inflammatory medications or muscle relaxants may be used, with your health care provider's supervision
- Braces or corsets for extra support
- Injections for pain relief in the area
- Nerve block, which decreases pain signals from the affected nerve
- Acupuncture

Conclusion

Old age is a unique life phase characterized by various health changes. A number of health challenges are common around the globe whereby disease is the most common. The study observed that with age, older adults (OA) experience increasing difficulty with cognitive, physical, and sensory functioning, which in turn affects social functioning and impacts independent living. In the elderly, neck pain and back pain are among the most common challenges they encounter. Hearing loss is reported to be the third most common chronic condition reported by elderly people. Also, age-related cataracts are also observed to be the leading cause of blindness in the world and one of the most common etiologies of visual impairment among the elderly. The study concludes that hearing aids are the most common treatment for hearing loss. Some types of hearing loss, especially conductive types, can be medically or surgically corrected, but others cannot. In cases where glasses prescriptions can't clear cataracts and refractive errors, the only effective treatment for that is surgery. If you have chronic pain in your back and neck, you should try several remedies that may be helpful before seeking surgical options. These include specific exercises to strengthen muscles and ease pain, such as stretching and flexing.

Recommendations

1. People should adopt good lifestyles such as good eating habits, involvement in physical activities, observation of adequate sleep, avoidance of stress and harmful substances before and during old age in order to avert future health challenges.
2. Health challenges should be addressed as early as they emerge so as to not to allow it gain root and become resident before being tackled.
3. Government should create awareness on the need for regular health check-up not only by the elderly but by all and sundry.

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