Chapter 3

Promoting Successful Positive Aging Across the Health Continuum: A Holistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

The increase of human lifespans and the aging has brought increased attention to what factors contribute to aging healthy. People are not only interested in longevity but how to remain in the best health in their later years. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to (a) understand the concept of positive aging (b) identifying the factors contributing to successful positive aging across health continuum (c) review strategies that promotes management healthy aging in elderly, and (d) identify future directions to promote successful population health management programs/interventions. The holistic approach, therefore provide an opportunity to improve the situation of older people in society.

INTRODUCTION

The older adult population is expanding, living longer, with multiple chronic conditions. Understanding and managing their needs over time is an integral part of defining successful positive aging. Population Health Management is used to describe the understanding, assessment, implementing holistic strategies and health outcomes of a population. Interventions promoting health across a continuum tend to be disease, risk, or health behavior specific rather than encompassing a global concept of health.

Positive Aging

Positive Aging is a way of living rather than a state of being in later life. It is an approach which recognizes how negative mental states (beliefs, thoughts, ideas, attitudes) can have a detrimental impact on
physical and emotional wellbeing as person ages. It focuses on the emotional and psychological aspects of aging. It understands that the ‘mind’ can have a big impact on our physical and emotional wellbeing. This term is used to describe the process of maintaining a positive attitude, feeling good about oneself, keeping fit and healthy, and engaging fully in life as you age. Aging is often associated with many rewarding experiences. It is however also a time when significant changes might occur. For example, some people experience changes in physical functioning, social networks, employment, and bereavement can become more common. Keeping a positive attitude toward aging is particularly important as it allows continuing to feel good and have a sense of control. As people age it is natural for them to move in and out of periods of positive aging. Those who age positively live longer and healthier lives, and enjoy a good quality of life (Martínez-Maldonado et al., 2016).

According to the World Health Organization and the United Nations (UN), population aging is both one of humanity’s greatest triumphs and one of its greatest challenges. Notwithstanding further increases in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in the coming decades, it has been proposed that the expected increase in the sheer numbers of people over the age of 65 years will lead to increased demands on our health and welfare services in particular. However, the WHO and UN also propose that it is how we plan for the aging of our population, how we choose to address the challenges and to maximize the opportunities, that will determine whether society can reap the benefits of the ‘longevity dividend’. In essence, they propose that societies that are willing to plan can afford to grow old. Planning should focus on keeping people as healthy as possible for as long as possible. Planning should also focus on the positive opportunities provided by large numbers of healthy and active older people and of the significant contributions that they continue to make in society as consumers, workers, mentors, caregivers, child-minders and as volunteers.

Davey and Glasgow (2006) suggested several underlying themes can be identified in analyzing the Positive Aging Strategy (PAS) statement, encapsulating its core values:

…fostering a positive view of aging; promoting attitudes which respect and value older people; recognizing and supporting older people’s participation and contribution; valuing self-reliance, independence, individual responsibility; acknowledging diversity among the older population.

Table 1, using direct quotations, shows how the first four themes identified in PAS are reflected in the National Strategy for an Aging Australia (Andrews, 2002) and the United Kingdom’s Opportunity Age – meeting the challenges of aging in the 21st century (HM Government, 2005).

CHANGING MIND-SETs TO PROMOTE INCLUSION

Older people are often viewed as sick and disabled non-contributors to society and dependent on the welfare system. In recent years, another stereotype of older people has been emerging – one that portrays them as healthy, financially secure and taking advantage of state benefits that they can afford to pay for themselves. Neither of these portrayals properly captures the heterogeneity of the older population and of their contributions to all aspects of society. U.S. Census Current Population Report suggests that the older adult population (65 years and older) will almost double from 43.1 million in 2012 to 83.7 million in 2050 due to the aging Baby Boomers and increases in life expectancy (Ortman, Velkoff, & Hogan, 2014). This number also reflects a larger representation of minorities among older adults increasing