

# Geriatrics – 95 Years Young

**Dr MANU KOTHARI**

**Dr LOPA MEHTA**

Dept of Anatomy, Seth G S Medical College, Parel, Mumbai - 400 012. Tel: 24131763 Extn: 2025

Ignaz Nascher, an American physician, coined the term *geriatrics* in 1914, as a polar apposite to pediatrics. "The medical aspects of ageing have been studied since early civilization and this field has been given such names as geromica, gerocomics, or, geroncomia, depending on the author and the national language." All these terms are traceable to Skt. *Gera* = grow old, wear out, and to Gk. *Geras* = old age.

If, as the mere effect of time, a leaf must wither, a flower wilt, and a fruit fall, so must all the tissues of the mammalian body respond predictably to the flow of time, making all age-related "problems" as coursals, and no way needing any "causal" agents. No cause, no cure. India had had her Yayati and the Bible had talked of Methuselah who lived for 969 years. Both of them grew "very very old" and exhibited all ravages of time. Geriatrics, then, is the discipline of palliating the inevitable, by words or works. Genetics, as a means to avert, dampen, or reverse aging will always be a pipi-dream.

It has been guesstimated that 85% of the health-budget of "5-star" countries is spent on the last 15 years of human life-span. If geriatric is glorified palliation, then surely most of the expense on it can be saved. But medicos have converted every age-related, coursals, issue into a foe-to-be-fought-no-matter-what-the-cost. The result is needless hospitalizations and procedures.

A simple solution to the above is to see any age-related change that is symptomless, and hence dis-ease-free, as mere dysia, that the person can live with unto the grave. Consider two "killer" problems – cancer–prostate, and coronary-artery-disease (CAD). All males above 70 have 100% incidence of cancer, but only 1 out of 400 such cancers dis-ease the owner, the rest never

bothering to bother the courier. Surely such microscopically verifiable prostate cancer is no dis-ease, and hence merits the appellation dysia to be lived with. Many an elderly coronary angiograph is rich in multiple partial/total coronary blocks *sans* any symptoms, and hence not in need of any investigation, much less treatment or follow-up. And as medical texts aver, even if modern medicine were to "treat" these "killer" problems, all that they do is to palliate at a great cost, making the hitherto-at-peace-person into a worried and harried individual, broken in spirit and bankrupt financially.

"Normal ageing, in the absence of disease, usually does not begin to cause functional problems for people until the age of 75 or 80 years." Moral: If an aged person is symptom-free, do not drag her or him into the vortex of check-up, a magical area into which a person walks in, and wherfrom a patient walks out, on the strength of a battery of latest scans and blood tests. Rang, in 1977, wrote of "the mischievous investigation" that (like our leaders), instead of guiding, misguides the patient and the doctor onto an investigative and therapeutic safari, lasting for days, costing a fortune, and begetting nothing but iatrogenic misery.


To appreciate the wholly *palliative* nature of geriatrics, let us have a look at the established science of cancerology, symbolized, in India, and for much of the world as TATA. Since 1949 that the TATA Memorial Hospital/center came into being, until this date, the story has been: Test And Tumor Ascertained. Tumor accessed therapeutically Annihilated. Tumor And Tumor Again. Test And Test Again. Treat And Treat Again. Cancer's competitive is CAD, wherein the *atheroma* has been held as but a tumor and

hence the entire TATA gamut is applicable to CAD, with as frustrating results.

Much of the aging-phobia and geriatric overdoing can be avoided if most aged are told that the term *old* comes from *altos* = height, meaning they have scaled a certain height, during which there has been Age Governed Evolution of their entire frame, much in the way that it affects the young. To be *vradddha* is to have attained *vradddhi*, no slur but honor.

In geriatric practice, it pays to quote the aged heroes in the likes of titan, Voltaire, Churchill, Chichester, Chaplin, and Khushwant Singh. All of them, in their 80's and 90's, remained/remain creative, youthful, inspiring, and joyful. Not one of them attributed their longevity to any

virtuousness. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. A French woman – Madame Jeanne Clement – recently celebrated her 121<sup>st</sup> birthday and died at age of 122. She never had a single day's illness in life and she felt that her health and longevity were due to her interest in rich food, cigarettes and alcohol. Amazingly, she did not mention sex. But we need to concede that many an elderly has thrived on the inspiration derived from a warm another body. Chaplin was 78, Hen Oona his wife was 44, when delivered their 9<sup>th</sup> child. Geriatricians must emphasize that aging is more a state of the mind than the state of the hind. Do you get us, Steve? (*Editor: Yes we do, and we strive to please!*)

If you want to know how old a woman is ask her sister-in-law. – Edgar Watson Howe   
An old gentleman was so horrified by what he read about the effects of smoking that he gave up reading. -

How we treat our old people is a critical test of our national quality. A nation that lacks gratitude to those who have honestly worked for her in the past, when they had the strength to do so, does not deserve a future, for she has lost her memory and sense of justice. – David Lloyd George

We cannot do a great deal for the older person without, at the same time, doing a great deal for society. One is a reflex of the other. – Lawrence K. Frank

We do not stop laughing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop laughing.

No wise man ever wished to be younger. – Jonathan Swift

Wrinkles are indicators of where smiles have been. – Mark Twain.

A ten year old boy was smoking in the street and an old lady walked up to him and said sternly "young man, does your mother know you smoke?" the boy drew up to his full height and said sternly, "lady, does your mother know you stop and talk to strange men on the street?"—Dissuade

Look upon retirement as a green light to finally do the things you have always wanted to do. The misery of a child is interesting to a mother; the misery of a young man is interesting to a young woman; the misery of an old person is interesting to nobody.

An elderly gentleman had serious hearing problems for a number of years. He went to the doctor who fitted him with a hearing aid that allowed him to get back his hearing completely. The gentleman went back in a month to the doctor and the doctor said: "your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again"

The gentleman replied: "oh, I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to their conversations. I've changed my will three times!"

Courtesy - Mr K L Khandpur