

Global Health Systems for Care of Older Persons: State of Development

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Population aging is an unprecedented global phenomenon which will continue into the 21st century. Older people are also aging. The fastest growing segment of the population is the 80+ age group. Epidemiological evidence suggests that there is phenomenal increase in chronic, degenerative, and progressive diseases in the society. Health systems modeled around the single disease concept aim at curing or relieving distressing symptoms by accurate diagnosis and treatment. These systems operate from acute hospitals managed by specialists of diseases and organs gathering evidence from RCTs. Older patients with multimorbidity are excluded from the majority of such evidence-generating trials. Consequently, health personnel are now facing a “new” type of patient who presents with an array of concomitant clinical conditions. This “new” patient presents a degree of complexity not previously considered by the traditional understanding of medicine. The response to this complex older patient has been variable around the

world depending on socioeconomic situation of the country and functioning of the health care systems. Approaches for evaluating the needs of such complex patients have not been standardized including the behaviors of nurses, physicians, therapists, nursing homes, home care services, and health systems. In this scenario of uncertainty Geriatric Medicine emerged as a medical specialty of the 20th century – much after the development of organ and procedure oriented specialties. Inspired by the realization that institutionalized elderly with multiple functional impairments can be restored back to community by careful review and rehabilitation, geriatric medicine has now become relevant to all older people, regardless of the care setting or level of economic development of the society where they live. Apart from variations in health care financing, Geriatric Medicine practice globally follows the similar trajectory. The Venkoba Rao Oration will highlight the health systems in old age care in different parts of the world.