

THE FUTURE OF GERONTOLOGY

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Retracing our steps

- ▶ Singapore Gerontological Society was established more than 3 decades ago by a visionary dedicated group of volunteers who saw the challenges that an ageing society would bring
- ▶ Mr Henry Lim was an icon to many of us who admired his unwavering belief that Gerontology education and practice would provide a strong foundation for dealing with the challenges
- ▶ Today, Gerontology education has established itself in the institutions of higher learning such as SUSS and NTU. There are at least 8-10 Centres or Institutes that focus on ageing such as Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Centre for Active Ageing, Duke- NUS Centre for Ageing Research and Education, and the Geriatric Education and Research Institute. In Nanyang Poly and Temasek Poly Gerontological courses and diplomas are offered.

Reasons for Gerontology's significance in meeting challenges

- ▶ 1. Multidisciplinary perspective
- ▶ 2. Multidimensional problem-solving
- ▶ 3. Comprehensive approach (holistic)
- ▶ 4. Biopsychosocial and spiritual lens
- ▶ 5. Life course sociological perspective gives a better understanding of how and why later life issues arise
- ▶ 6. Multiracial and multi-religious societies need more complex solutions, therefore professionals need advanced level training



My personal journey

Graduate student at NUS

Social Work Background

Developed modules such as “Working with Older Adults”

Training workshops conducted at FRTC, MCYS, NCSS on various aspects

Research topics

Publications

▶ Quantum Leap

- ▶ Move from NUS to SIM University in 2011 to start Master of Gerontology (1st in Singapore)
- ▶ 7th Intake now - approximately 80 applications for 30 places
- ▶ PhD in Gerontology launched in July 2017
- ▶ Next year, to double the number of places offered

Career prospects:

Health care sector - more hospitals,
nursing homes, integrated centres

Social care sector - family service
centres, counselling centres,
hospices, community-based agencies

Great need for more family education talks to focus on roles of grandparents in families, the intergenerational transfers, the communication gaps, the importance of support networks for caregivers of elders (silver caregivers), discussions among family members about advanced care planning, wills and Mental Capacity Act.



Lonely Isolated Elders

- ▶ LIVING ARRANGEMENTS - why are they important?
- ▶ Marital status - what is the meaning of marriage in old age? Singlehood?
- ▶ Having adult children - a boon or bane???
- ▶ Having grandchildren - a source of joy when they are young, but withdrawal symptoms when they become teenagers
- ▶ Increase in statistics of elderly living alone (or with spouse only) in Singapore
They would include those whose adult children have migrated overseas, and those who are divorced, married but childless, or single.
- ▶ Major issue of lack of Family caregiver

Cohort characteristics are changing rapidly

- ▶ “Preparation for an ageing population necessitates the synchronization of policies, services and programs as well as the reviewing of these to keep in tandem with changing cohort characteristics. Apart from this, new research has to be regularly conducted to provide statistics and insights for relevant policy planning and service provision.” (Mehta, 2011 in “Relevance of Gerontology for an ageing society”)
- ▶ Expectations of the baby-boomer generation
- ▶ Policies and services have to match the expectations of baby boomers
- ▶ Anxiety created by issue of cashless top-up of EZ link cards

The Positive Upside picture

- ▶ Government is pushing ahead with Lifelong Learning programmes, supported by Skills Future subsidy so that middle aged adults can work longer by upgrading their skills and knowledge
- ▶ More adults are seriously taking charge of their health through health screening, diet and exercise
- ▶ The working life of adults is prolonging and it helps to keep them active and connected with society
- ▶ Policies that support:
 1. Skills Future awards, and Credits
 - ▶ 2. Availability and accessibility of Silver InfoCom workshops, IT literacy courses, caregiver training workshops and talks, health seminars (nominal charge), health trackers, virtual health education messages
 - ▶ 3. Retirement and Re-employment Act 2012; extension of retirement age to 67.

How can Gerontology contribute?

- ▶ Gerontological Society has to step up its education talks to reach out to seniors in heartlands; greater use the website to spread knowledge
- ▶ The certificate courses in Social Service Institute and organisations such as RSVP, C3A and SOKA have to be offered regularly so more people can attend - we still have situations where the services exist but family members are unaware of their existence eg. Home palliative care, dementia 'eldersitters', art and music therapy for people with dementia.
- ▶ A multi-pronged ADVOCACY strategy has to be adopted wherein research institutes, Universities and Polytechnics, VWOs, and family caregivers co-operate to influence policies and service delivery. Perhaps the Gerontological Society and the Geriatrics Society can join and lead this effort.

Going forward

- ▶ The Role of trained professionals - mentor and train the juniors
- ▶ The role of government in recognizing the growing importance of profesionalising the ageing sector
- ▶ Use social media, radio, TV, drama to promote positive ageing

