



A Day for the Aged



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CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE



Caring for the elderly

As we commemorate the International Day of Older Persons today, let's be more mindful and compassionate towards the aged population around us and help them age healthily

Dr Renu Abraham Varughese

In the last decade, the population growth in India (2011 to 2021) for people above sixty years is 38.8 percent, leading to the current population of 137.9 million, which is 10.1 percent of the total population (Ministry of Statistics, 2021). The aging trend in Kerala over the last six decades grew from 5.83 percent in 1961 to 20.9 percent in 2021. Because Kerala is greying faster, there is an urgent need for policies and services (public transportation, home assistance such as meal programs, supportive and inclusive environments, equal employment opportunities, non-discriminatory access to quality health care, elder-friendly infrastructure, and social protection) targeted for older persons in Kerala to facilitate

healthy aging.

The Global Strategy and Action Plan on Ageing by United Nations (2020) designated this decade (2021-2030) as the 'Decade of Healthy Ageing'. The four areas identified for action include age-friendly environments, combating ageism, integrated care, and long-term care. This year's theme for International Day of Older Persons is 'Digital Equity'. However, accessibility to digital technology and closing the digital divide between communities and ages remains a challenge. Availability of technology and internet services equip rural elders in remote areas, and ones with limited mobility to live in safer and healthier communities. These services entail telehealth, and telemedicine (in absentia care), access to public services, smart phones, smart homes with

ecosystems, smart alarms, and home monitoring mechanisms.

Robotic assistance is also gaining popularity in enabling functional independence and aging in place for homebound elders. Robots may alleviate caregiver burden to a certain extent. Prevalence of chronic disabilities and conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders, arthritis, sensory deficits, Alzheimer's and related dementias cause dependency and burden families with significant social and economic implications.

INSTITUTIONAL LIFE IN KERALA

Old age dependency rate (26 percent) is higher in Kerala than any other states in India. Hence, it is no surprise that Kerala reportedly has the maximum number of old age homes or retirement homes in the country.

Institutional life is still not widely accepted here but there is a growing pressure for older adults and their families to choose this option due to multifaceted reasons. Factors such as limited social and family support system and informal care giving options, parents in Kerala and children abroad scenarios, children providing long-distance care to their ailing parents living alone, societal awareness of age-related care demands and lack of care givers, positive attitude of retirees and their children toward Assisted Living Facilities (ALFs), and most importantly the affordability factor for upscale senior living by NRIs are directly linked to recent inflation in admission to senior care centers.

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Children are the ones to make direct inquiries about admission to facilities with modern amenities, spacious living, and quality care services for their parents. In summary, when home-based care is not adequate, ALFs are needed to ensure continuity of care for older adults who are functionally dependent.

ALFs provide a range of services including but not

limited to supervision, limited or partial assistance to full assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs), medication administration, wound care, tube feeds, catheter care, rehabilitation services etc. It supports short or long-term residencies depending on the needs of the elders. Short term stays include respite care or short rehabilitative care after surgery or hospitalization before returning home.

The goal of long-term care services is to restore, maintain and prevent functional decline, when

FOUR AREAS IDENTIFIED FOR ACTION BY UN

- Age-friendly environments
- Combating ageism
- Integrated care
- Long-term care

returning home is not a viable option. However, ensuring quality care delivery and best practices based on research evidence is essential to maintain functional ability, dignity, and quality of life in care facilities. Before admission, prospective residents and families should tour the facility, meet with the care team to discuss specific care options and if possible, request a trial stay to experience what to expect, when considering long term stay.

SERVICE QUALITY BASED ON BEST PRACTICES

Professional service and quality of care is central to geriatric care management. A comprehensive health assessment on admission, and at regular intervals by interdisciplinary team members including

physician, social work, nursing, rehabilitation, dietary, therapeutic activities, with inputs from resident/family is the first step.

Next, a personalized plan of care based on assessment findings that best match the resident's needs should be formulated with specific goals. Residents' customary routines, dietary preferences, history and diagnoses, functional endurance and strengths or limitations be taken into consideration when planning interventional strategies for rehabilitation and restoration of function. Potential risks for falls, bowel and bladder incontinence, pressure ulcers, weight loss and dehydration should be identified, and plan of actions initiated on admission to prevent such complications and status deterioration. Care plan updates with resident and family at regular intervals and for any significant changes in status should be mandatory.

STANDARDIZATION OF CARE REGULATIONS

Regulations that govern care delivery, policy and practice guidelines need to be implemented in all senior care settings to ensure safety and quality of care. Currently, the National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) and

National Programme for the Health Care for the Elderly (NPHCE) set policies, but there are no mandatory regulations or benchmark standards in place for facilities that ensure standardization of services for stakeholders. However, Standards Wise International India (SWII), a subsidiary of Standard Wise International, partnering with Association of Senior Living India (ASLI) has launched a new initiative this year, on assessing and accrediting senior living communities in India. This initiative open avenues for further research and policy implications for senior homes in India.

SPECIALIZED WORKFORCE FOR GERIATRIC CARE

Despite the recommendation from the Government of India, gerontology education or a specialized work force for long term care is still limited in India. Geriatric experts, developing curriculum focusing on critical thinking and problem-solving skills, is needed to advance this specialization as well as equip a robust long-term care work force to face the challenges of elder care.

The author is a clinical gerontologist and Associate Professor, School of Health and Natural Sciences, Mercy College, NY, USA

Healthcare systems must focus on community-based care for prevention, promotion, curative, palliative, and end-of-life care including dental care and vaccinations that are safe and affordable for older adults.