

Guest Editorial

Geriatric Neuropsychology

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1. Introduction

Advances in scientific research and medical care, identification of important factors that contribute to long-term physical and mental well-being, and an enhanced appreciation of the need to maintain a pro-active approach to health management have all contributed to the growing number of older adults living in the United States (US). US census figures indicate that in 2000, 35 million people in America were aged 65 or older [4]. This expanding segment of the population is projected to total 47 million in 2016 and 62 million in the year 2025 [5]. Population aging is being experienced by nearly all of the countries in the world, with the worldwide proportion of older adults growing at a considerably faster rate than the total population [3]. In 2007, the world proportion of adults age 60 or older was estimated to be 11%. This percentage is up from 8% in 1950, and this age group is projected to account for 22% of the worldwide population in 2050 [3].

The transition into late adulthood is associated with a number of physical, psychological, and social changes [2]. In addition to offering opportunities for personal growth and life enrichment, late adulthood is associated with an increased risk of chronic illness and disability. Arthritis, acquired brain injury, chronic pain, congestive heart failure, dementia, degenerative joint disease, delirium, depression, and diminished sensory

functioning are but a small number of the conditions that can compromise the health and quality of life of older adults. Growing appreciation of the aging worldwide population has contributed to increased awareness of the need for skilled health care professionals to serve this population. Investigation of the readiness of the US health care system to meet the ongoing needs of an aging population indicates that there is a shortage of geriatric service providers [1]. Moreover, it is believed that an interdisciplinary treatment team approach, utilizing a full compliment of various health care professionals, who have obtained specialized training to prepare for the unique challenges commonly encountered in geriatric practice will be needed [1].

Geriatric neuropsychology is a growing subspecialty of neuropsychology that plays a significant role in providing necessary services to older adults and their support systems. As noted previously, older adults are vulnerable to a variety of neurological and psychiatric disorders that may contribute to disability and compromise their quality of life. Neuropsychological assessment can assist in diagnostic clarification, including distinguishing cognitive decline associated with normal aging from the consequences of a pathological process. Identification of an older adult's neuropsychological strengths can provide a foundation that supports the development and implementation of personalized rehabilitation services that can enhance the likelihood of achieving optimal outcomes. The geriatric neuropsychologist is also positioned to identify the presence of a psychological disorder, such as depression or problematic anxiety, which may be contributing to excess disability. Providing education and psychological support

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to the family members and loved ones of older adults, some of whom may assume a caregiver role, is another opportunity for neuropsychologists to deliver beneficial services to this population. Although it is clear that the future health care needs of aging adults will present challenges to health care systems worldwide, it is also evident that as members of interdisciplinary treatment teams, geriatric neuropsychologists are in a unique position to provide essential services to older adults and their support systems.

2. Purpose and format of this special issue

The purpose of this special issue is to provide a resource to practicing clinicians that incorporates recent research and information from neuropsychology and related disciplines deemed essential for clinical practice with older adults. Although this special issue is devoted to geriatric neuropsychology, it is recognized that older adults often present with complex needs that requires the services of various health care related disciplines. Accordingly, effort was made to provide practical information that may be of benefit to many of the disciplines that are called upon to provide services to this population. Similarly, because the health care needs of the aging population are an international concern, attempts were made to identify practice issues and recommendations that are germane to clinicians worldwide.

This special issue is comprised of seven articles that together address a number of key clinical and professional issues related to the practice of geriatric neuropsychology. In the first article, Weyer Jamora, Ruff, and Conner review a number of the challenges faced by front line clinicians, including medical and psychiatric co-morbidities, assessment and normative issues, polypharmacy, and reimbursement rates. In the second article, Caplan and Shechter examine the complex issue of nonstandard assessment and test accommodations for older adults. In the third article, Moberg and Rick present issues surrounding the assessment of decision-making capacity and competence in the elderly. The fourth article, by Uomoto, reviews rehabilitation practices following acquired brain injury. In the fifth article, Zec and Burkett present treatment considerations and rehabilitation recommendations designed to alleviate disability and promote functioning following the onset of dementia secondary to Alzheimer's disease. The sixth article, by Elliott and Pezent, reviews the unique concerns and issues frequently encountered by

family caregivers of older adults. The special issue concludes with a review by Martin and Bush of ethical considerations related to the practice of geriatric neuropsychology.

3. Conclusion

A worldwide need for health care professionals skilled in serving older adults has been identified. Given the unique and varied needs typically encountered in geriatric practice, it is evident that a comprehensive approach to health care that employs an interdisciplinary treatment team is best suited to serve this population. Geriatric neuropsychologists play a significant role in providing essential services to older adults and their support systems. We hope that you will find this special issue to be a valuable resource that provides practical information to guide clinical practice and promote the application of effective and evidenced based rehabilitation services to older adults.

Before concluding, we owe a debt of gratitude to a number of people who were instrumental in the creation of this special issue. First, we would like to express our appreciation to the Editors-in-Chief of *NeuroRehabilitation*, Drs. Nathan D. Zasler and Jeffrey S. Kreutzer, who recognized the need for a special issue devoted to Geriatric Neuropsychology and who provided us with the support and assistance we required to complete this project. Similarly, a sincere thank you is offered to Melissa Oliver, the Managing Editor of *NeuroRehabilitation*, for her hard work and commitment to this special issue.

We very much would like to acknowledge and thank our contributing authors. It is through their considerable knowledge, expertise, and enthusiasm that this issue has come to pass, and we believe that the culmination of their efforts has resulted in a "special issue" indeed. Finally, we are grateful to all of our colleagues in the various health related professions who work with passion and perseverance to identify and promote the application of scientifically based approaches to rehabilitation designed to alleviate disability and enhance the quality of life of those persons who have incurred neurologic injury.

References

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