

"Women as They Age: Addressing the Next Inequity Frontier" Seminar: A Brief Communication

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Abstract

This brief communication examines the implications of increasing life expectancy in females. It argues that a holistic approach is needed when designing and delivering support for women as they age, particularly whilst transitioning through the menopause and if assisted personal healthcare is required. It emphasizes the need for an intersectional approach in menopause management from healthcare providers and employers and the need for caregiver education programs to cater to the specific needs of aging women. This overview suggests that existing programs and interventions are insufficient and proposes solutions to bridge the educational gap.

Keywords: *Life expectancy; Females; Intersectional approach; Menopause management; Caregiving; Education programs; Aging women*

1. Introduction

At a recent seminar organized by the Salzburg Global, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and its operating arm, the Women's Health Activist Movement Global, concerns were raised regarding the healthcare of women as they age and gaps in caregiver education. Held on January 16-19, 2022, at Rancho Bernardo Inn in San Diego, the seminar titled "Women as They Age: Addressing the Next Inequity Frontier" brought together leaders to start a sustained network to enhance the quality of life for aging females. Recognizing the increasing need to support this population, several working groups were formed from seminar participants to cover issues that we as participants identified as important. As both authors of this commentary were inspired by the discussion topics, we aim to discuss key issues such as menopause transition and current caregiver options, circumstances, and training. Our additional motivation lies in the fact that life expectancy for women continues to increase at

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a faster rate than men, caregivers therefore require targeted knowledge. This is to ensure aging individuals, particularly females, receive effective support and care in all aspects of their lives which will then address their unique circumstances in later years.

2. Findings

The implications of shifting demographics point to the value of strategizing specialized solutions for safeguarding aging women's well-being. A key finding was that education was seen as key to properly equipping caregivers. Outcomes focused on the need to impart the necessary skills and information needed to tend to this growing demographic. The working groups' upcoming recommendations on menopause management and caregiver education follow. The rising life expectancy in females has led to a significant increase in the proportion of older women in the general population and key areas such as the workforce. By 2030, the world population of menopausal (defined as both peri- and post-menopausal women) will reach 1.2 billion. This demographic shift has created a greater demand for trained [1] caregivers to meet the unique needs of aging women. However, current caregiver education programs do not adequately prepare caregivers for these challenges. Previous research suggests that caregiver preparedness is essential to minimizing the negative impacts of caregiving. Not being prepared is associated with fear, anxiety, stress, and feelings of insufficiency/uncertainty specific to the caregiver role [2]. For example, in terms of the workforce, in the UK, 3 out of 5 women are negatively affected by the menopause at work - almost one million have left a job as a result[3]. Yet there is a significant lack of appropriate support at the workplace [4] and healthcare provision for menopausal women [5].

3. The Rise of Longer Life Expectancy in Females

Females consistently exhibit longer life expectancies due to various factors such as biological, hormonal, and behavioral differences [6]. This trend is expected to result in a significant increase in the proportion of older females in the population. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) states that between 2020 and 2025, women's life expectancy at birth will exceed that of men by 3 years [7].

4. Shifting Demographics, Workforce Profiles and Caregiving Demands

As the proportion of older females rises, there will be a greater demand for trained caregivers to cater to their unique needs. Current caregivers, predominantly women, will face increasing challenges due to changes in familial structures and workforce participation. It is crucial to address this demand by providing adequate caregiver education programs.

5. The Lack of Inclusive Workplace Practices

Lack of inclusive provision and support is undermining women's health, happiness, wellbeing, and career prospects. It is also negatively affecting employers and the economy, as women going through the menopause (most of whom are in the 45-55 age group in Western European countries) also tend to be highly experienced and valued role models whose departure from the workplace represents a significant loss for a company or organization. Published evidence indicates the wish for more communication and information about menopause in the workplace using an intersectional approach. Menopausal women expressed that information and advice on the menopause should be present in the workplace. In regard to this, previously

published evidence shows that *opportunities to support menopausal women*, such as information for both *women* and managers, inclusive practices and flexible working policies are crucial to help in these circumstances [8].

6. The Educational Gap in Caregiving

The existing caregiver education programs fail to adequately prepare caregivers for the specific challenges of elderly care, particularly in the context of aging women. Previous research shows that health care teams are failing to adequately include the caregiver's unique perspective, and that may make suboptimal treatment decisions and therefore the education for all caregivers and standardization is necessary [9]. Bridging this educational gap is crucial to ensure quality care for aging individuals.

7. Proposed Solutions

Funders need to certify specific research to build a strong evidence base of what works in menopause management, fill knowledge gaps, and share new knowledge about menopause at work. To address the educational gap in caregiving, specialized educational facilities should be established that offer comprehensive training programs focusing on aging according to individuals' needs, with a specific emphasis on the unique considerations of aging women. Previous research shows that despite demonstrated effectiveness, however, promising, interventions have not been disseminated and adopted in everyday settings [10]. These programs should cover ten topic areas including gender-specific health considerations, psychological and emotional well-being, cultural and societal factors, empowerment, and advocacy, and addressing health disparities. By providing caregivers with the necessary knowledge and skills, these programs will enable them to deliver high-quality care [11].

8. Additional Points on "Female-Centric Care"

The concept of Female-Centric Care emphasizes gender-specific health considerations, psychological and emotional well-being, cultural and societal factors, empowerment, and advocacy, and addressing health disparities. The WHO is developing policies that emphasize the importance of gender-specific approaches. Gender was underlined as a critical determinant of mental health and illness and there is growing awareness of the need to consider policy and practice through a gendered lens. Further, the gender-sensitive perspective to health care acknowledges how socio-political and cultural factors, on top of biological factors, create care needs, care delivery and impact health outcomes [12]. Adopting this approach can enhance the quality of care provided to aging women.

9. Additional Details on "Methodical Female-Centric Care Approaches"

Methodical Female-Centric Care Approaches prioritize systematic and evidence-based care, comprehensive assessment and planning, holistic care delivery, continual monitoring and evaluation, and collaboration and communication among caregivers and support systems. These approaches ensure that caregivers are equipped with the necessary tools to provide personalized and effective care. However, we are in line with previous studies that underline the choice for different approaches/methods in caregiving standards and therefore perceive it not necessarily as a problem, but rather an adaptation to the needs because what distinguishes them is how care itself is conceptualized, rather than the activities that are developed [13].

10. Conclusion

We conclude that implications of longer life expectancy in females necessitates a re-evaluation of caregiving practices. Adequate caregiver education programs, focusing on the unique needs of aging women, are essential to address the challenges presented by this demographic shift. By establishing specialized educational facilities and adopting Female-Centric Care approaches, caregivers can provide high-quality and personalized care to meet the unique needs of aging women. Bridging the educational gap will ensure that caregivers are well-prepared to address the physical, emotional, and social aspects of aging, taking into account the specific challenges faced by women.

We also conclude that a detailed re-think of menopause management is also needed. There is a strong business case for change within the workplace. When employers fail to adequately support their female staff during menopause, productivity falls, and the workforce loses some of its most experienced and skilled members. When healthcare provision is inadequate, women's health and wellbeing is negatively impacted and that increases the need for external support of a healthcare provider or caregiver.

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