

EMERGENCE OF GERIATRIC MEDICINE IN INDIA – NEED OF THE HOUR

Prasad Rao P. Voleti

Director, Division of Internal Medicine and Geriatrics,
Medanta – the Medicity Hospital, Gurgaon. India.

Email: prasadraovoleti@medanta.org

ABSTRACT

By going through this article it is well versed that Geriatrics is a burgeoning buzzword in India. The proper medical care of elderly adults should be complemented by looking in to changed effects of aging on the disease, consequences and response to treatment.

Keywords: Frailty, chronic diseases, Geriatric.

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INTRODUCTION

In India , as we are moving ahead to medical super-specialty era, where each and every organ in human body is getting deserved attention , which has led to overall improvement in longevity and increase in the life expectancy of an individual. But at the same time we are also noticing an increase in elderly population above 70 and more so above 80 years of age.

As per latest data from NSSO and NIHFWS the geriatric population is on the rise from 50 million in 1991 to 100 million in 2011 and expected to be more than 150 million in 2021 and so is the need for medical personnel required to serve this population in our country.

The proper medical care of elderly adults should be complemented by looking in to different effects of aging on the disease, consequences and response to treatment. There are so many chronic diseases which increase in prevalence with age, adding to this is progressive decline in performing basic activities of daily living.

The process of aging leads to homeostatic dys-regulation, energy production and its utilization, neurodegeneration and overall changes in body composition which further leads to reduced functional reserve, reduced healing capacity and failure to thrive. These features

are collectively termed as frailty.

Frailty is a predisposing condition to various geriatric syndromes e.g. Gait disorders, falls, cognitive impairment, disability and many more. Frailty makes an elderly person vulnerable to adverse outcomes and high risk of death. As we know disease and aging interact so it is important to prevent disease or to treat it appropriately to reduce frailty. In an elderly patient multiple symptoms are usually due to multiple diseases and multiple drug use. Poly-pharmacy their effects and side effects, weighing risk and benefit ratio before prescribing a drug is a very important concern in geriatric patients.

Multiple small abnormalities in different organ and organ system adding to disability are also discussed under a common topic called as Geriatric Syndromes, where the approach of clinician has to be multi-centric as treating just one or two diseases may not relieve the symptoms and often not curative.

Geriatric medicine is an established discipline in western countries and also some of the Asian countries. Even in India a few institutions have started training physicians in to geriatric medicine.

Separate academic departments are

being set up to cater acute care in this discipline but indeed a sensitivity towards palliative care , rehabilitation , preventive geriatrics , long term support in form of geriatric care and research initiatives are still lagging behind.

In our country new approaches and models of service for health care of elderly are required. Physicians in primary health care have huge responsibility in providing quality health care to older people.

They need to share their skills and knowledge in taking care of elderly patients and at the same time government institutions and big corporate hospitals should also play a role in bringing up academic departments , fellowship programs

and training in geriatric medicine . It should aim towards building multidisciplinary teams to provide comprehensive health care to old age people. The basic principles of medicine hold good in all ages, however the finer details greatly vary with extremes of ages.

Geriatric medicine as a separate clinical discipline needs a boost in India, like the one it has received in developed countries to prevent morbidity and mortality and improve the quality of life in geriatric population. Making elderly people available with the existing health care resources, innovating newer resources and channelizing them to reach this population is the need of the hour and it requires sincere efforts to be explored.