

Population Ageing and Research

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We are meeting for Gericon 2007 to reiterate our commitment to conduct meaningful research and provide adequate technical knowledge in geriatrics in our country. While global ageing represents a triumph of medical, social, and economic advances over disease, it also presents tremendous challenges. Population ageing affects social system, economic growth, trade, migration, disease patterns and prevalence, and fundamental assumptions about growing older.

The Global Burden of Disease, a study conducted by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, predicts a very large increase in disability caused by increases in age-related chronic diseases in all regions of the world. In a few decades, the loss of health and life worldwide will be greater from noncommunicable or chronic diseases (e.g., cardiovascular disease, dementia and Alzheimer's disease, cancer, arthritis, and diabetes) than from infectious diseases, childhood diseases, and accidents.

There is a need to raise awareness about not only global ageing issues but also the importance of rigorous scientific research and policy dialogue that will help us address the challenges and opportunities of an ageing world. Preparing financially for longer lives and finding ways to reduce ageing-related disability should become national priority. It is critical to address problems sooner rather than later. Waiting significantly increases the costs and difficulties of addressing these challenges.

Using available data the U.S. National Institute on Ageing (NIA) has identified nine emerging trends in global ageing:

* The overall population is ageing. For the first time in history, and probably for the rest of human history, people age 65 and over will outnumber children under age 5.

* Life expectancy is increasing. Most countries, including developing countries, show a steady increase in longevity over time, which raises the question of how much further life expectancy will increase.

* The number of oldest old is rising. People age 85 and over are now the fastest growing portion of many national populations.

* Noncommunicable diseases are becoming a growing burden. Chronic noncommunicable diseases are now the major cause of death among older people in both more developed and less developed countries.

* Some populations will shrink in the next few decades. While world population is ageing at an unprecedented rate, the total population in some countries is simultaneously declining.

* Family structures are changing. As people live longer and have fewer children, family structures are transformed, leaving older people with fewer options for care.

* Patterns of work and retirement are shifting. Shrinking ratios of workers to pensioners and people spending a larger portion of their lives in retirement increasingly strain existing health and pension systems.

* Social insurance systems are evolving. As social insurance expenditures escalate, an increasing number of countries are evaluating the sustainability of these systems.

* New economic challenges are emerging. Population ageing will have dramatic effects on social entitlement programs, labor supply, trade, and savings around the globe and may demand new fiscal approaches to accommodate a changing world.

The window of opportunity for reform is closing fast as the pace of population ageing accelerates. We therefore have only a few years to intensify efforts before demographic effects come to bear. We can share the experiences of the countries that have already begun to address issues of population ageing. There are exciting opportunities for economic expansion and cross-national collaboration as well, but we must act now or the costs of waiting—financial and social—will be overwhelming.

We will have to establish priorities for areas of research on ageing and strategies to ensure that the

ageing research sector had the capacity, capability and visibility to meet current and future research needs. It is important to have a solid evidence base for determining what factors impact on the well-being of those aged 60 and over today and also to have strong research to help understand the critical issues for future generations of older people.

A number of key areas for research are demographic changes, independence and ageing in place, social issues, health, work, attitudes to and experiences of ageing. Current system has the difficulty of effective

communication and information sharing across a diverse area, which encompasses government agencies, academics and NGOs in both social sciences and health fields. This can potentially lead to duplication, and reduced opportunities for collaboration among researchers. Some form of improved co-ordination between them would be useful.

We have several presentations for the conference but there is lot to be done to expand the area and quality of research on ageing.