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## **Creating Quality Life through Geriatric Care: Human Leadership Way**

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### **Abstract**

*The effects of an aging population have become an issue that need to be addressed due to the serious and far reaching impact that it will have on a country and its citizens; to be precise its senior citizens. For Malaysia, senior citizen is defined as aged 60 and over. For other countries, it can be refined as aged 55 or aged 65 and over. The worries of an aging population are many – loss of income and employment upon retirement, the lack of health care, companionship and public facilities that can cater for their needs. This research will study the various programmes and initiatives that have already been implemented successfully in other countries and seek to suggest, identify what are the particular challenges facing an aging population and how Companionship, improvement of public facilities and healthcare could be done to create a quality life for senior citizens especially in Malaysia.*

***Key Words: Aging population, Companionship, public facilities, health care.***

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**Introduction:** The norm is that governments and nations are more concerned about the increasing health costs, the reduction in productive workforce and the economic impact it has on the nation in catering to an aging generation that will contribute less and will continue to contribute less and less as the years go by. A statistic announced by Women, Home and Social Welfare Ministry of Malaysia, which published in The China Press (2015), one of the Malaysia Chinese Daily News stated that in the year 2015, the aging population in Malaysia was 9.9%, amounting to three (3.0) million people. By the year 2035, the aging population is expected to increase to 5.6 million people or approximately 15 % of the total population. And they even urged the public to be aware of this, and advice those remain single or couples without children, to have an early plan for their old age.

There is often a distinct lack of public facilities, companionship and health care for senior citizens. In actual fact, unless an individual has amassed enough savings or accumulated enough wealth before retiring from work or business, a senior citizen will struggle to cope with the loss of employment, reduction of income, health problems that can be expected as a result of getting old and inter-generational issues brought about when the children- they have been caring and supporting all this while- achieve a new status. And caring for the elderly parents should not be confined to just giving them money every month, but also to care for their inner needs, such as respect, love and support.

The Governments and society in general must realize that companionship, proper health care and improved facilities for recreation are all required to improve the quality of life for the seniors. A cursory glance abroad will capture what has so far been implemented to address these key areas and what needs to be done currently and in the near future.

**Companionship:** Companionship often refers to the pleasant benefits of shared activities, camaraderie, and enjoyable interaction. The benefits of companionship include the mood enhancing effects of good interaction and effects that may enhance positive affect support resilience, and support a person's sense of self-worth (Rook et al., 2011). Friends often are sought out for companionship benefits rather than to gain social support. Family relationships may provide companionship, but often bring a mix of role obligations as well as chosen companionship opportunities.

*It has been known that loneliness and social isolation have been clearly linked to poor health outcomes. The lack of companionship has been demonstrated to lead to numerous detrimental health effects in older adults and increase the risk of accidents, injuries, dementia and other problems.* In "A Review of Social Isolation" by Nicholas R. Nicholson (2012) described isolation among seniors as alarmingly common among families. And this situation will continue to increase as the senior population grows. The prevalence of isolation among "community dwelling older adults" or seniors who live at home rather than senior living communities, may be as high as 43%. So this has become a big issue to the society.

Jeff Anderson (2014) describes 14 ways to help seniors avoid isolation, of which some are suggested as below:

- a) **Encourage them to Keep Pets:** Pet owners are known to remain engaged socially, have less depression, suffer less loneliness, feel more secure and require less medication than non-pet owners. Animal companionship facilitates the making of friends and gives a reason to get up in the morning. Of course, the senior must first desire and is willing to take properly care for the pets. Many experts feel that the act of nurturing can relieve feelings of social isolation. In the peer reviewed paper "Emotional Benefits of Dog Ownership," Eve E. Beals (2009), pointed out the benefits of nurturing a pet: Assuming the senior is capable of caring for a pet, nurturing and caring for an animal companion can be quite beneficial for the person.

It is quite common in Malaysia that most families are keeping pets like cats, dogs and birds etc.

- b) **Sharing Food with others:** The simple act of eating together can be heart-warming. Sharing food among seniors or with parents, children, in-laws, visitors and anyone is also food for the soul. It doesn't have to involve anything fancy. It can be done in an open park, community hall, home, church group, restaurant or any other eating place. The act of eating with others has been inherently described as social activities. In "**Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective,**" Robin Fox (2003), writes that *eating is "a profoundly social urge. Food is better shared; People should eat together; mealtimes are events when the whole family or settlement or village comes together."* Dining together with others is also likely to help promote better nutrition, which is crucial for the elderly. Many health benefits of relationships are likely to be more subtle than those illustrated in these examples.

An uplifting conversation that introduces hope and joy into the morning may influence physical activity, healthy food selection, or the choice to engage further in pro-active social relationships later in the day or week.

In Taman Aman open park, Petaling Jaya (Malaysia), a group of senior citizens have food sharing 3 days a week after their morning Praise Dance exercise. (Picture 1) This group of elderly people also celebrate each other's birthday (Picture 2) , sometimes they share stories, sometime sing along, and even play games together. These activities really make them feel young at heart, and look younger than their age, also bring them a lot of happiness as a big family. They also create a group chat in their smart phone by addressing themselves: Happy Family. This has help them to occupied their free time by sharing through hand phone, even without meeting each other face to face.

**c) Fellowship in Religion Activities:** By going to a place of worship, whether it is a church, mosque or temple can be a good way to find companionship and support in spiritually fellowship. For seniors, the daily or weekly social connection has been shown to be quite beneficial, many studies have shown the benefits of churchgoing for seniors: “Those frequently attending religious services have been found to have lower mortality rates than those with infrequent attendance.” Other people in the group are also likely to detect a decline in an isolated senior that may have gone unnoticed otherwise. In a group sharing of testimonial, they have closer relationship with their fellow members, where they can share each other's happiness and even problems in their life. Sometimes, this so call brothers and sisters relationship are even closer than their siblings. In Malaysia, most of these organization provide weekly activities for all ages, some with fees and most of them are free of charge.

Other ways to give more care to seniors:

**1. Joining Social Activities:** In the article published by the Sin Chew Daily (2015), Seniors who indulge in hobbies or past times that interest them are less likely to succumb to the negative effects of social isolation. Besides providing a sense of purpose, many hobbies and interests are inherently social in nature. Anything that involves a group, whether it is for a game, entertainment or exercise, can be said to be socially healthy. By joining activities as visit the old folks home, the orphans home or a day trip to local tour (Pic 3) etc. can encourage them to remain active in their hobbies and interests, and providing them opportunities to volunteer can help them maintain their sense of purpose and keep them from becoming isolated and lonely. Other activities and entertainment such as normal exercise, singing, social dance, movies, reading, drama concert or even attending classes like cooking and bakery class, painting class etc. are also suitable for the old adults.

In Malaysia, the best example would be like the Tai-chi, the Praise dance, and Qigong groups that have mushroomed especially in urban areas like Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya, Penang and other locations. This can be carried out in open fields, community halls, etc. The range of examples is broad, and the individual variation almost infinite.

**2) Upgrading their Skills:** No matter how advance the world has changed, we still have to face the facts that after growing older, our mental and physical problems will increase day by day. This will be more obvious for those elderly people who tend to stop learning or stop joining any social activities then those seniors who are still active in learning skills or involve in other activities. Therefore, Focus groups can be organized for seniors to share their knowledge and passed down their experiences. The more qualified, experience and

capable senior citizens from the rank should take the lead in helping their fellow citizens to improve themselves, showing them the way and also proving them the opportunities if necessary. The focus groups can include regular talks especially health talks to teach them how to take care of themselves, the changes that are happening to their bodies, how to prevent accidents at home and so on.

We must create the opportunity to teach new skills and impart knowledge for senior citizens to upgrade themselves. Depending on the ability, experience and mental aptitude of each person, this can help them to improve their employability and perception of life besides improving themselves as a person. A simple thing like learning how to use the smart phones, computers or accessing the Internet will add a new dimension to their lives. Such efforts will help reduce the generation gap. *"The biggest problems for many older people is 'Ageism' rather than the process of aging itself"* LYNNE SEGAL, (2013). We tend to look at older people as helpless and fragile, as if as soon as someone passes certain age, their agency and self - sufficiency is completely lost and can't think nor make decisions for themselves." Some even have families war, where the young and old are living in the same house but as enemies. So building up a good relationship with the elderly are very important, this attitude should practice from young. By improving their knowledge can help in narrowing the generation gap between the elderly and the younger generation either at home or in the outside world.

**3) To Respect and Protect the Old Age:** According to the reports of The Bridge (2015), aging in population has increased a lot of medical expenses to its own country because 75% of the old age group is suffering from various kind of sickness. For those age above 65 years old, the percentage of committing suicide is 5 times higher than normal people, the risk is higher for male than the female. In order to avoid this , we have to pay more attention to their needs, and bear in mind that, to care for our elderly parents is our responsibility . Don't push away the responsibility to the Government or public. We should even extend this kindness to the old adults around us in our daily life. As for those old adults without family, we can help to arrange by sending them to the Old Folks Home, so that they can be taking care of. We must show our concern and respect to them even if they start behaving so unreasonable at times. With love and patient from our inner heart, we can surely be more kind to them. Another way to reduce the depression of the old age, our behavior and manner to them is very important. They are more sensitive now as they feel themselves 'useless', or even a 'burden' to their family especially to those who suffer from long term sickness. Then, this is the time to ease their mind: you have to make them understand that being getting older each day does not mean that they have become our liability, for in life, everyone shall turn old someday. Make them feel that we are ready to care, even to protect them as our family members.

**Public Facilities:** One need not have to look far to gauge how countries and governments around us are planning and coping with the effort to provide enough public facilities for an aging population. Let's look at Hong Kong and Singapore. In Hong Kong, it is estimated that by 2041, nearly one in every three people in Hong Kong will be aged 65 or above. *"An aging population creates greater demands on social security, healthcare and elderly services."* Due to better health care, future generations of elderly people are expected to be healthier and more energetic. The following efforts have been undertaken by Hong Kong to provide better public facilities:

**Neighborhood Active-Aging Project (NAAP):** Hong Kong launched in 2008 the Neighborhood Active-Aging Project (NAAP) to promote active aging, develop community support networks and encourage elderly people to serve the community as volunteers. There were a total of 75 district projects that had been carried out across the territory between 2008 and 2011. The project engaged more than 200 000 elderly persons and their family members.

Another phase of NAAP was launched in early 2012 and a total of 69 district projects were carried out until 2014. Hong Kong maintains that an active and productive life is important for elderly people to stay both physically and psychologically. This is because there are many facets of active aging. Some elderly persons may still prefer to work full-time, part-time or as volunteers. Retired elderly people provide a ready pool of volunteers to serve other groups in the community. They conclude that an age-friendly environment encourages active aging by enabling elderly people of various capacities to stay healthy, active and independent.

### **Improved Public Facilities:**

**Hong Kong:** In Hong Kong, the Government has also implemented other various initiatives including the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities which greatly enhances the mobility of elderly people. Seniors aged easier access to physical accessibility to buildings and public facilities. The scheme enables elderly people and eligible persons with disabilities to travel on the general Mass Transit Railway (MTR) lines, franchised buses and ferries at \$2 per trip." The estimated government expenditure of the Scheme was around \$600 million in 2013-14. The daily average passenger trips using MTR, buses and ferries by elderly people under the Scheme is around 580 000."

Hong Kong has also launched the Improvement Programme of Elderly Centres (IPEC) cum Jockey Club Elderly Facilities Modernisation Scheme (JCEFMS) Starting from 2012, 237 elderly centres had been modernised with improved physical setting and facilities in phases with combined funding of HK \$900 million from the Lotteries Fund and \$110 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. IPEC cum JCEFMS will enable some 200,000 users of the elderly centres to engage more fully in community life. Hong Kong also announced in 2012 the new policy on "Universal Accessibility" to further enhancing the accessibility of existing public walkways for elderly and other people in need to move around with greater ease.

**Singapore:** In Singapore, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry for Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) have announced the development of new nursing homes, Senior Care Centres (SCCs) and Senior Activity Centres (SACs) to support a growing senior population in Singapore. The initiative is to prepare for the future where one-fifth of Singapore's resident population are above 65 years old. The Singapore government plans to locate aged care and support facilities within the community so that more seniors can age gracefully within the community and close to their loved ones, for as long as possible. Its long-term aim is to make every neighbourhood senior-friendly.

The MCYS and MOH in Singapore will jointly develop the following range of aged community facilities in Housing Development Board (HDB) towns including developing 56 new Senior Activity Centres (SACs) by this year (2016). A total of 45 centres will be set up in Ang Mo Kio, Bedok, Bukit Batok, Bukit Merah, Bukit Panjang, Bukit Timah, Choa Chu Kang, Geylang, Hougang, Jurong West, Kallang, Pasir Ris, Punggol, Queenstown, Sengkang, Novena, Tampines, Toa Payoh, Woodlands and Yishun.

The MCYS will also be developing 39 new Senior Care Centres (SCCs) this year to meet increasing demand for aged care in the community. These centres have been confirmed to be in Bedok, Bukit Batok, Bukit Merah, Geylang, Hougang, Jurong West, Kallang, Pasir Ris, Punggol, Queenstown, Sengkang, Serangoon, Tampines, Toa Payoh, Woodlands, Yishun.

SCCs, formerly known as Integrated Day Facilities, will provide day care, dementia day care, day rehabilitation services and basic nursing services. Families can drop off their aged parents at the centres during the day knowing that their parents are being cared for. The MOH will be developing a total of 10 new nursing homes by this year to meet the demand for nursing home services. The nursing homes will complement home care and community centre-based services, by providing residential nursing care for seniors who are very frail and need a longer period of recuperation.

The new nursing home sites will be located in Ang Mo Kio, Chai Chee, Choa Chu Kang, Geylang, Hougang, Jurong East, Jurong West, Queenstown, Radin Mas and Yishun. The 10 nursing homes will add an estimated 3,300 beds to Singapore's existing nursing home capacity of 9,000.

Some of the local churches also participate in this social works, as they will fix a date weekly to gather the old adults for free afternoon tea time, and take them out for movie once a month, in different residential area which are nearby to their churches.

## **Health Care:**

**Healthcare strategies for an aging society (2009):** The concerns of an aging society raised usually focus on the economic viability of health systems. In the United Kingdom, people over-65 visit their doctor seven times a year, on average, while those aged 16-44 do so only four times a year. Worse still, the over-65s account for two-thirds of general and acute hospital bed use, even though they make up only about 16% of the population. In the US, the over-65s made up 13% of the population in 2002, but required 36% of healthcare expenditure. The average spending on this group was more than three times the figure for those of working age. What is becoming more apparent is that healthcare spending on the average individual rises rapidly in the year or two before death, irrespective of age.

**How Mexico, India approach health cares:** Different countries adopt different approaches to health care. Dr. Julio Frenk, dean of the Harvard School of Public Health, and formerly Mexico's health minister, explains that his country's health programmes focused on diseases that had been pervasive yet relatively inexpensive to address. "You cannot deal with chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease and diabetes, thinking that you can continue to spend the same level of resources as for acute diarrhoea or other easily preventable childhood conditions," Dr Frenk says. Mexico accounts for 80% of the world's health spending, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"Reforming the healthcare financing system is an essential part of dealing with an ageing population." Many developing countries are looking at bigger economic issues than funding health care for older citizens. These issues will pose challenges for funding age-related health care cost increases.

For developing countries like India, its huge population cannot even afford decent health care even at current cost levels, says Dr Narottam Puri, president of medical strategy and quality for Fortis Healthcare Limited, based in India. This is a problem common to less developed countries. In most countries, the proportion of people of working age—who generate the income to pay for medical care—will increase, even as the number of elderly grows because of the drop in the number

of children. According to UN figures, the dependency ratio (the number of non-working age to working age people in a society) will decline or stay stable in less-developed regions—with the exception of China—until at least 2050.

**Japan's long term health care:** Japan has decided to supplement its national pension plan with Long Term Care Insurance (LTCI), which was implemented in 2000. Professor Nanako Tamiya, a Japanese health care expert writing in *The Lancet*, called LTCI “one of the most generous long-term-care systems in the world in terms of coverage and benefits.” This comprehensive plan removes the anxiety and unpredictable nature of elderly care elsewhere. People pay into the system starting in their 40s and are eligible to receive benefits starting at 65, or earlier if they fall ill. A care plan allows patient to choose between competing institutions and service providers offering everything from home visits, bathing and help getting groceries to paying for short stays in hospitals or long-term residence in nursing homes and specialized group homes for dementia patients.

The LTCI system covers up to \$2,900 a month in services. LTCI co-payments are capped or waived for low-income individuals, and the system saves money by providing options other than full-on institutionalization. About six million people are enrolled in LTCI. However, the Japanese government has already introduced significant reforms in 2011 that attempted to better integrate health care, prevention and long-term care. Over the years, Japan has demonstrated to other governments around the world that it pays to adjust programs before problems become systemic.

**Conclusion:** The fact remains that countries, Governments and Society as a whole have a duty and an obligation to provide better care for its aging population irrespective of its status (as a developed or developing nation) or taking into account other socio-economic factors. The initiatives, plans and programmes can be varied but should also take into account the following:

- 1. Opportunities for Senior Citizens to be Self-Sufficient:** In Taiwan, a charity organisation—The First Social Welfare Foundation— does just that. Its cleaning service earns over NT\$100 million per year. The group's cleaning team comprise mostly senior citizen (Lin Qi Bo, 2013). Such efforts provide an opportunity for fit and healthy senior adults to work. This will provide a means of income for them after retirement, also to reduce the depression after retirement as feeling "useless" and 'no value' in their old age life.
- 2. Provide Mobile Health Care:** With advancing age comes more health problems. This has become a fact of life and a major concern to those who are geeing older in years. The Government and Private Hospitals should provide mobile clinics to go to different locations to provide basic health examinations and basic medical treatment for senior citizens. This would be very helpful for them as the mobility of senior citizens are often drastically reduced as a result of advancing age, lack of private transport and reduced or no income. These services should be in a regular basic and free of charge.
- 3. Encourage a Policy for Preferential Treatment:** Shops, restaurants and businesses should offer Discounts to Senior Citizens. This has already been practiced in the Philippines (Senior Citizens Act of 2010). Under this Act, senior citizens just present their Identification Card to buy food or watch a movie at discounted rates (Pic 4). And the disabilities too, enjoy this offer in their daily life.

In Malaysia, businesses like Restaurants, Shops, Cinemas, Hotels, Public Transportation, should offer special discount to the senior citizens. At the moment only certain Public Transportation Company offer discount to the local seniors, and some Hotels providing discount for High Tea to the

old age, but we can even expend the discount to other field such as Dental Clinics, Private Medical Centre, Hair Saloon and Book shops. This will lighten the burden of the family members; also encourage their children and the younger generation to take them out more often.

All the activities and dialogues that take develop at these places of gathering will keep them busy and occupied. More importantly, they can share, express and discuss any issues and problems that they are facing because they can relate better to one another as a result of similar situations.

With all this effort and identities after taking a survey in each residential area, we can build up the awareness and encourage the participation of public in creating a Quality Life for the Old Age, by giving more care to the aging population of our country. Together, this good habit should practice from young, not only in school or at home, but by you and me.

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**Appendix:**



Picture-1: Food sharing in the open park, Taman Aman, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.



Picture -2: Celebrating Birthday among seniors.



Picture-3: One Day Local Tour is one of the popular activities among the old adults. (Bentong Waterfall, Pahang, Malaysia)



Picture-4: This pictures was taken in the food-court of the Mall of Asia, Manila, Philippines.