

## Book Review

WHO's Ageing & Life Course Program, 2002. Active Ageing. A Policy Framework. Geneva: World Health Organization. WHO / NMH / NPH 02.8. This fully illustrated 60-pages publication can be downloaded from:

[www.who.int/hpr/ageing/index.htm](http://www.who.int/hpr/ageing/index.htm);

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One of the signs of our evolution towards a real information society is the electronic availability of full scale scientific and policy publications free of charge and ready for print. The quality of your own printer and binding facilities is the limit. And, if you don't want to keep it, you may read it from the screen.

This contribution of the World Health Organization to the Second United Nations World Assembly on Ageing (Madrid, Spain, April 2002) is intended to stimulate the formulation of action plans that promote

healthy and active ageing. For feedback purposes, a preliminary version was widely circulated in three different languages: English, French and Spanish. In addition feedback workshops were held in Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom, and an expert group meeting took place in Kobe, Japan in January 2002 with participants from 21 countries.

Active Ageing seeks answers to a number of fundamental questions on remaining vital, independent, and active in the ageing process, and on preventing bankruptcy of health care and social security systems. It targets governmental decision-makers, the non-governmental sector and the private sector, and -indeed- it also addresses researchers and engineers, to achieve the goal that healthy older persons remain a resource to their families, communities, and economies as stated in the WHO Brasilia Declaration on Ageing and Health in 1996. The publication is divided into 5 sections. Part 1 states that global ageing is both a tri-

umph of technology and policies, as well as a challenge to societal quality and cohesion. Between 1970 and 2025 a world growth of people age 60 and over of 694 million or 223% is expected! By that time 60+ persons will make up about one third of the population in countries such as Germany, Italy, and Japan; and around 30% in Belgium, Canada, France, Greece, Netherlands, Spain, and United Kingdom. It is shown that in all countries, and especially in developing countries, keeping people healthy and active is not a luxury, but a necessity for economic growth and social stability.

Part 2 explores the concept and rationale for Active Ageing as a process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. 'Active' refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic affairs, and so exceeds greatly the ability to be physically active and productive in the work force. As to 'Health' the old WHO definition is adhered to, declaring that Health refers to physical, mental, and social well being. In the Active Ageing Framework, promoting mental health and social connections are as important as improving the physical health status. One could say that the complete taxonomy of gerontechnology is addressed here. Indeed measures may be taken as early as during foetal life.

Part 3 summarizes the determinants for individuals and populations to enjoy a positive quality of life as they age. The list is long and ranges from gender and culture, along economic, social and physical environments, to personal heredity and behaviour, and health and social services. This section is fully viewed from the viewpoint of a policy maker. However, in between the lines one may understand the need for new and innovative, dedicated, and unobtrusive technology to be pushed by policies and programs. New medications and vaccinations are mentioned by name. Built environments are hinted at by stating that building codes need

to take the health and safety of older people into account. And, interestingly, injuries due to falling or other causes are not treated as 'accidents' any more, but as preventable (read: flaws in technology).

Part 4 discusses seven key challenges associated with an ageing population that addresses governments and the non-governmental, academic, and private sectors: (i) the double burden of disease; (ii) the increased risk of disability; (iii) the providing of care for ageing populations; (iv) the feminization of ageing; (v) ethics and implicit and explicit inequities; (vi) the economics of an ageing population; and as a result (vii) the forging of a new paradigm. The traditional viewpoint that old age equals retirement, illness, and dependency is slowly becoming disruptive to society. An intergenerational approach recognizes the importance of relationships and support among and between family members and generations. It also challenges the notion that learning is the business of children and youth, work the business of midlife, and retirement the business of old age.

Part 5 provides a policy framework for active ageing and concrete suggestions for key policy proposals. This includes age-friendly, safe, and clean environments, barrier-free living, healthy nutrition, affordable, equitable access to care and other services, ageing at home and in the community, protection, safety, and dignity of older persons, to name a few.

Active Ageing deserves the interest of researchers and professionals in the interdisciplinary domain of gerontechnology. The Policy Framework developed may also be used to further structure and mature our research and engineering endeavours, and to foster communication with policy makers.

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