Culture, Cancer and Old Age

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Hadassah University Hospital
Jerusalem

SIOG
Madrid, 2007
Old Age

What is so special about being old?...
What would Socrates say about old age?...
That life becomes so circumscribed that it is no longer worth living...or that it is a time to contemplate what we were and what we are?...

J.M. Coetzee, 2006
“Slow Man”
Old Age

Is “old age” a socially and culturally imbedded way of thinking or is it also a biological reality?

C. Bailey et al., 2004
Eur J Cancer
Old Age

Old age is not only biologically and physiologically based… It is rooted in the cultural values and norms of each society… in the accepted or stigmatized behavior toward old age.

W. Liang et al., 2004
JCO
Old Age

In a culture that idealizes youth, health, independence, beauty, physical strength, success…

Is there any place for being old?
The risk is that old age might be represented only in terms of impairment, comorbidity, cognitive limitations… and the burden of care placed directly on the family and healthcare system.

W. Liang et al., 2004
JCO
Cancer and Old Age
# Older Population: Developed and Less Developed Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>% of 65+ from total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,194,404,891</td>
<td>28.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>580,979,422</td>
<td>10.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>613,425,469</td>
<td>17.21</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Less Developed</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,009,400,426</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2,543,579,895</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2,465,820,531</td>
<td>5.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic Policy Committee, European Commission, 2006
### Older Population: Aging Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80+</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-79</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic Policy Committee, European Commission, 2006
## Cancer and Old Age
### Developed and Less Developed Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of 65+ from total population</th>
<th>% of (cancer in 65%+) from (total N of 65+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developed countries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28.07</td>
<td>3.72</td>
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<td>10.86</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17.21</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing countries</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10.51</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic Policy Committee, European Commission, 2006
Cancer and Old Age

- One million cases of cancer are diagnosed every year within the European community.
- Sixty percent of all cases of cancer in the Western world are diagnosed in people over the age of 65.
- Two-thirds of all cancer mortality occurs in this age group.

J.M. McKoy et al., 2007
Oncology
Cancer and Old Age

- Older people are diagnosed later in the disease process.
- Receive less rigorous staging of their disease.
- Undergo less aggressive treatment.
- Experience lower survival rates.

Z. Chouliara et al., 2006
Ann Oncol
Cancer and Old Age

In patients $\geq 80$ years old, nearly 50% are undertreated, with a strong decrease in specific survival as a consequence.

J.M. McKoy et al., 2007
Oncology
Cancer and Old Age

Elderly women with breast cancer received late diagnosis, incomplete diagnostic assessment and lack of standardized therapeutic approach.

D. Hind et al., 2007
Br J Cancer
Cancer and Old Age

Paradoxically, meta-analyses indicate that older people cope better with cancer psychosocially than younger people. Their positive response to cancer is related to:

- Greater life experience.
- Ability to use multiple resources.
- Coping in the past with other difficult life situations.

B. Thomé et al., 2004
Cancer and Old Age

Findings of studies of cancer showed that:

- Older people with cancer are content with the information they receive but not satisfied with the quantity and quality of care and contact.

Z. Chouliara et al., 2004

Ann Oncol
Cancer and Old Age

Findings of studies of cancer showed that:

- Older people with cancer present a number of needs regarding decision making, treatment and coping with their illness in general, but such needs are not met by a paternalistic healthcare system.

- Older people wish to know their cancer diagnosis and to be kept informed about their treatment progress, but often do not wish to be told every detail about progression of their illness and their length of survival.

Z. Chouliara et al., 2004
Ann Oncol
Cancer and Old Age
Meta-Analysis: Chemotherapy in Older Population

American studies:

- No difference in the acceptance of treatment between older and younger patients.
- They differ in their willingness to exchange survival for current quality of life.
- Older patients wanted to receive same amount of information as younger patients.
- Patients 60 years and older tended to have higher threshold of acceptance for chemotherapy.

M. Extermann et al., 2003 JCO
Cancer and Old Age

...Is there, perhaps, a double standard for aging and for cancer care?...
Culture and Old Age
Culture and Old Age

“Civilization is judged by the respect and treatment of its minorities”…

Mahatma Ghandi
Culture and Old Age

...Is old age a social-cultural minority?...
In the 21st century, the majority of the world’s older people are living in Asia; and 95% of their elderly reside with family members.

WHO, 2006
Culture and Old Age

Asia - basic concepts:

- Respect and care for the elderly sick have roots in Asian culture.
- Confucian norm of filial piety and respect for elders has been central for centuries.

P. Kraeger et al., 2007
India - basic concepts:

- Aging dictates a withdrawal behavior from worldly activities.
- Disengagement constitutes normative order of aging.

I.M. Hweidi et al., 2006
Culture and Old Age

India - basic concepts:
For elders, the family remains almost the only source of residential, economic and emotional sustenance – with exception of widows.

S. Sudha et al., 2006
Culture and Old Age

Eastern Mediterranean Muslims:
Proportion of people over 65 years of age in this area is approximately 3.6% of total population.

WHO, 2006
Culture and Old Age

Muslim - basic concepts:

- Religion affects the way in which older people are perceived.
- Based on religious norms from the Qur’an, older people are a source of wisdom and guidance.

I.M. Hweidi et al., 2006
Culture and Old Age

Muslim - basic concepts:

- Caring for one’s parents or relatives is considered an honor and a blessing.
- Opportunity for great spiritual growth.
- “Old-age” homes are against the basic teaching of the Qur’an.

V.A. Ypinazar et al., 2006
Culture and Old Age

Muslim - basic concepts:

- Majority of older people are living in multigenerational households.
- Religion and culture encourage strong family ties, obedience to the elders and compliance with their values.

I.M. Hweidi et al., 2006
Culture and Old Age

Muslim - basic concepts:
Women in their roles as daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters and spouses are the main care providers for the elderly and the ill.

T. Boggatz et al., 2006
Culture and Old Age

- How far can the need for support of the elderly be met by their families? …
- Do all families have the capacity to offer care? …
- At what cost? …
- And what if the families are not available? …
Culture, Cancer and Old Age

…If old age is both a socio-cultural and biological reality…
Can patients be helped and cared for through the long trajectory of cancer?… How?… And by whom?…
Culture, Cancer and Old Age

Healthcare professionals should provide tools, interventions and modes of care, so that patients and families can be empowered to improve their quality of life and death…
Thank You!