



New Zealand

Association of Gerontology

Te Ropu Matauranga Kaumatua o Aotearoa

August 2006

An Invitation to a Conference with a Difference...

Ageing is fast becoming a trendy topic to study and discuss. The spectre of population ageing looms large. In only another five years the advance guard of the baby boom generation is due to reach chronological old age. By 2021 the numbers of people over 65 are likely to exceed that of people under 15.

Perhaps even more significantly for future welfare and service provision, the proportion of very old people - those over the age of 85 - is predicted to increase dramatically.

Concern about the effects of population ageing is not a new phenomenon. In the late 1980s, a flurry of apocalyptic predictions of future economic unsustainability appeared in gerontological literature. These messages of doom then lessened as countries demonstrated that their economy and social fabric could seemingly survive the challenges of a rapid structural ageing.

A realisation in New Zealand of our own impending population changes has awakened fresh interest in ageing and related policy imperatives. People are wondering how best to manage demographic ageing over the coming years.

Back in 1995, a British writer Charles Handy claimed that, even though every generation knows they are different from others, they plan for succeeding generations as if they will be the same. How do we avoid this happening here? One obvious precaution is ensuring that we have developed soundly-based empirical knowledge on ageing and that we translate this into policy.

A one-day conference, *Ageing in New Zealand: Reporting Research Progress*, being held later this year will be a decisive step in promoting understanding of ageing.

Date: Monday 13 November 2006
Venue: Te Papa, Wellington
Time: 9.00 am – 5.00 pm

The New Zealand Association of Gerontology has immense pleasure in joining with the New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing and the Ministry of Social Development to co-host this day.

This exciting event will draw together strands of age-related research from across New Zealand. The aims of the day are two-fold. Firstly, participants will have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with latest research developments from a wide range of projects being carried out around the country. Secondly, participants will be able to contribute to discussion on strengthening the linkages between research and policy.

The conference programme is innovative and thought-provoking. Professor Hal Kendig, Professor of Research and Ageing at the University of Sydney, will be setting the scene by placing New Zealand research in an international context. Concurrent sessions of research presentations follow this, together with a showcase of Government initiatives on ageing, and a panel debate on the relationship between research and policy. Time is provided for mingling with other participants and sharing views.

I would urge everyone with an interest in ageing to attend this day. More information and registration details are available through the New Zealand Association of Gerontology website: www.gerontology.org.nz

Verna Schofield
President
New Zealand Association of Gerontology

NZAG Conference 2007

Ageing: The Everyday Experience

New Zealand Association of Gerontology
Conference - Hamilton 14 – 16th November 2007

The ageing of the population is attracting increasing attention from national, regional and community organisations as well as private businesses. But irrespective of the intentions and actions of the many

interested parties, it is the older person who ultimately experiences ageing and growing older.

The purpose of the conference is to address how factors such as economic status, cultural and societal values, policy, relationships, health services, professional support, spirituality, psychological and/or physical traits, previous life events and one's state of wellbeing contribute to *The Everyday Experience* of ageing and growing old.

Aims of the Association

- To stimulate interest and action in all matters concerning the welfare of older people.
- To encourage the training of those caring for older people.
- To act as advisors to interested persons, bodies or groups on aspects of ageing.
- To study ageing in all its forms, and to promote gerontological research.

What Do Older People Want?

My initial reply when asked to contribute to this column, in response to the broad question “what do the elderly want?” was not altogether facetiously expressed as “Not to be called the elderly!” It is not appropriate for me, or anyone, for that matter, to attempt to speak *for* older people. As a social scientist, I have made it my business for the last fifteen years to speak *with* people who are chronologically older than I am. In this work, I continually find chronological age is by no means irrelevant, however much we position ourselves according to “age-appropriate behaviour.”

Most of us act in several ways in relation to chronological age. We celebrate each birthday with a mix of joy and regret – one only has to read the text in commercial greeting cards to interpret the mixed messages presented in embossed wording or cartoon graphics. Ambivalence about the passing years echoes around us all in our personal and family lives. Pop psychology and sociology surrounds us as we experience ageing at a personal level. Studying ageing in all its aspects, which is how gerontology is defined by the NZ Association of Gerontology, has the unique perspective of being personally significant to all of us. As well as facing daily our own experience of ageing, many of us relate closely to the experiences of our parents or grandparents, who go ahead of us into their seventh, eighth or ninth decades.

We all experience living in an ageing society. The demographics confront us daily, whatever our age. The doom and gloom prophecies surround us – how will we all cope with the impending cost-of-care burden? How are we best to prepare to support ourselves or others beyond our earning years? Historians who have studied closely the ways in which later life has been handled over the years, have cautioned us to “beware mourning the world we have lost”. In 1901, people over the age of 64 years made up just 4% of the population. By 1999, those aged over 65 made up 12% of the NZ population, and by 2031, this age-group is predicted to exceed 20% of the population.

When life was shortened by conditions we would now consider preventable, families and communities had to manage their own juggling act, supporting those of any age who needed long term care and protection. Some of my recent research has been with those who provide help, care and support to older family members, and this is regularly invisible from the public record. Like many other social researchers, I await with interest the results of the recent Census, which will chart in more detail some of the often hidden patterns of our ageing society.

In global terms, New Zealand is well in the top quarter, according to UN statistics, of societies defined as ageing at an advanced rate. The combined effects of extended life expectancy and reduced fertility are even further advanced in countries such as Japan and Italy, and many other parts of Western Europe. Conversely, many countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America continue to experience the opposite mix of high fertility and lower life expectancy.

The slogan which the UN promoted in 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, was “Towards a Society For All Ages”. In my view, we could all come to terms with the march of time every year under such a banner. I

also find confidence in some new language arising in demography and sociology, which describes the current emergence of “mature societies” as those who are managing to cope with the societal demands of an ageing society.

At a political policy level, we have in New Zealand our “Positive Ageing Strategy”. Other countries, and researchers around the globe, struggle with other labels such as “Successful Ageing” to accentuate the positive.

No matter how one describes ageing, researchers and older people’s advocacy groups alike agree that what older people around the globe want is to “age well” – to be accorded human dignity, to be included in families and communities, and to have choices about how, where and with whom they spend the latter years of life. None of us seeks to be marginalized, to suffer from ageism or discriminatory practices, or to have our individual rights and wishes over-ridden or disregarded. We are unable to settle for poor standards of care, if we are personally supporting a family member suffering from the consequences of illness or a chronic health condition.

I am tempted to offer a simplistic response to futuristic projections of demographic changes ahead for an ageing society - the only thing we can be sure of is that there will be more of all of us. The “grey wave” is likely to come in all shades. There will be more labels, whether the wording is self-chosen or imposed: baby-boomers, Third Agers, the elderly, the oldest old, the young old, people living alone, those finding new living arrangements within their family or community, those testing their levels of achievement whether in marathon running or creative writing, those living with varying levels of disability or disadvantage.

There will be more of those ageing well, and those not so well. Let’s hope that with maturity, whether personal or societal, comes the wisdom to act well and age well, and to arrange society on the basis of balanced research and learning, rather than prejudice and stereotypical thinking.

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Dr Sally Keeling is a Lecturer at the Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, where she teaches in the postgraduate Gerontology programme. She is the immediate past-president of the New Zealand Association of Gerontology.

Marian Bland PhD Research

Marian Bland is a registered nurse and the Associate Professor of Nursing at UCOL, Palmerston North. In her PhD research Marian explored the nature of comfort in three residential care homes through critical ethnographic research. The study included 90 days of participant observation, formal interviews with 27 residents and 28 staff, and extensive document examination.

The New Zealand residential care industry portrays itself as providing a ‘home away from home’ for residents, offering them as ‘ordinary a life as possible’. This research revealed that residential care life was anything but ordinary, despite the best intentions of all those involved in the residential aged care sector. Residents had few opportunities to participate in decisions relating to their care. The dominance of ritualised care delivery routines, the challenges of communal living, and the overwhelming presence of suffering, added to the discomfort of leaving their own homes.

The findings of this research challenge the notion that residential aged care can ever be considered ‘home’ in the normal sense of the word. There is an urgent need to clarify the purpose of residential care homes, and identify the practices that would enable residents to fully participate in every aspect of daily life.



News in the Capital

This is the first of a new series on recent developments in government policy relating to older people.

News from the Ministry of Social Development

Improving service delivery to older people

The Ministry is examining how we deliver services to people aged 65 and over. This involves identifying some immediate enhancements to Work and Income services to New Zealand superannuation clients and, in the longer term, identifying what services the Ministry should be providing and how these should be delivered.

Implications of population ageing publication

The Institute of Policy Studies and the Retirement Commission are publishing a book in September 2006 that looks at the implications of population ageing for a range of areas. For example, retirement incomes, health, the labour market, housing, families and communities. The book – edited by Jonathan Boston and Judith Davey – will include the work of MSD and other agencies and researchers in the field of population ageing.

Indicators of progress towards Positive Ageing Strategy goals

MSD is currently working on producing a report that will assess the achievement of the overall wellbeing of older people in New Zealand. For this purpose, MSD is developing a set of indicators linked to the Positive Ageing Strategy goals. The report is due to be published in 2007.

New Zealand superannuitants and veterans pensioners: eligibility changes

From 1 July 2006, all New Zealand superannuitants and veterans pensioners who live in the community and have a partner living in long-term residential care became eligible for the higher single rates of New Zealand Superannuation or Veteran's Pension. Before 1 July 2006, people could only receive these rates in a limited range of circumstances.

On 1 July 2006, the 'sharing expenses rule', which previously limited eligibility for the Living Alone Payment, was removed. The removal of the rule means that entitlement to the Living Alone Payment is now based solely on actual living arrangements.

Also on 1 July 2006, the period of time a person can continue to receive New Zealand Superannuation or a Veteran's Pension while carrying out volunteer work overseas for a recognised aid agency, was increased from 52 weeks to 156 weeks.

News from the Ministry of Health

The Primary Health Care Strategy and Older People

The Primary Health Care Strategy and the Health of Older People Strategy are very aligned. They both focus on people being able to live their lives as independently as possible within their own communities. This includes support to maintain or regain their health, and assistance to manage when chronic conditions or illness lead to loss of function.

Since the launch of the Primary Health Care Strategy (PHCS) in 2001, the sector has made significant progress, meeting the Strategy's key priorities for early action. This includes establishing Primary Health Organisations (PHOs), enrolling populations, making changes to funding mechanisms, and creating a framework to deliver health gains.

The vision of the PHCS is to improve the health of local populations through a population approach, improved access to services, and the exploration of new approaches to service delivery. The focus is now shifting to concentrate more on achieving aims central to the Strategy – reducing health inequalities, engaging communities, and improving the prevention and management of chronic conditions.

The Ministry and DHBs have developed a joint programme to deliver on the vision of the PHCS. This will begin in August 2006 and includes:

- improving the way funding is managed,
- developing new models of care that support co-ordinated and integrated care,
- finding ways to share appropriate information more easily, and
- helping people to find out what is working well around the country so that successful approaches spread.

All this work will have a big impact on older people, because older people are major users of primary health care services.

Web Sight

This regular column offers a sample of interesting resources on the internet related to ageing.

AARPAgeline

The AARP website is an extraordinary resource. Particularly noteworthy is its Policy and Research section (found on the top right of the home page). Here you can find research reports on a wide range of topics. Furthermore it provides free access to the AgeLine database. AgeLine abstracts the literature of social gerontology as well as aging-related research from psychology, sociology, social work, economics, public policy, and the health sciences. AgeLine contains over 75,000 English-language publication abstracts and is updated bimonthly.

You can use Ageline for free at:
<http://www.aarp.org/research/ageline/>

Growing older

A new meta-site for New Zealanders on resources related to older people is being developed by Family and Community Services in the Ministry of Social Development. Growing Older is part of the FamilyWeb. Current topics for the web internet resources lists are Financial Support, Health and Well-Being, Accommodation, Transport, Employment, Understanding and Protecting Your Rights, Education, Recreation and Leisure, Connecting with Your Community, Positive Ageing, Grief and Loss, and Grandparenting.

Access this site at:
<http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/info-for-families/familyweb/growing-older.html>

Drivers licence changes

The new system for the renewal of drivers licences for older people will be introduced on 4 December 2006. The Ministry of Transport has provided a set of frequently asked questions, and their answers, to summarise the changes. The summary is also available as a pdf document to download.

The summary, and other relevant resources are available online at:
<http://mot.sites.silverstripe.com/older-licence/>



Wellington Branch

The fog that prevented Rosslyn Noonan, Chief Human Rights Commissioner, being able to address the July meeting provided an opportunity for discussion, led by Judith Davey, on Social Policy Issues and Older New Zealanders.

Judith's request for the diverse group of attendees to name issues that they deemed important, elicited a wide range of responses. For example:

- Ageism
- Retirement income
- Reverse mortgages
- Issues related to high needs and low income
- Under-funding of elder care, lack of quality, and safe home care
- Workforce issues including training, numbers, and standards
- Work options for older people
- Innovative, supported accommodation
- Affordability and access to dental, eye and hearing treatment options
- Access to healthy homes
- Interdependence and connectedness, and roles of families and friends

A much discussed question was- "What does positive ageing mean to a frail, poor, older person in substandard living conditions?"

One answer was- "That the person was being listened to and involved."

A statistic that emerged was that local authorities were increasingly acknowledging their role. Whereas in 2004/5 only three local authorities had older persons strategies, by 2006/7 twenty five will have been developed.

Palmerston North Group

The Palmerston North group's most recent session was on "Exercise, Sport and Aging". The speaker was John Downey, lecturer in sports management at Massey University. A main theme of the talk was the potential of exercise to slow down many age-related physiological declines.

In June, several people from the PN group attended a research seminar entitled "Psychosocial ageing from 70 to 100+: Longitudinal findings from the Berlin Aging Study (BASE)". The speaker was Professor Jacqui Smith from the Max Planck Institute of Human Development in Berlin.

The speaker outlined the methods, and some of the wealth of findings, of the Berlin Aging Study - a major multidisciplinary longitudinal study of Berliners aged 70 and over. Details of the study can be found at <http://www.base-berlin.mpg.de>

2006 Calendar of events

October 4-6

Newcastle, NSW, Australia
Australian and NZ Society of Palliative Medicine Conference
Web: www.willorganise.com.au/anzspm

October 13-15

Melbourne, Australia
3rd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity
Web: www.longevity-international.com

October 12-14

Berlin, Germany
Alzheimers Disease International Conference
Web: www.alzheimer2006.de

October 19-22

Quebec City, Canada
34th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Canadian Association of Gerontology
Web: www.cagacg.ca/english/420_e.php

November 4-5

Geelong, Victoria, Australia
1st Biannual APS Psychology & Ageing Interest Group Conference
Informing Psychological Interventions
Web: www.psychology.org.au

November 13

Wellington, New Zealand
Ageing In New Zealand: Reporting Research
Web: www.gerontology.org.nz

November 16

Miami, Florida, United States
59th Annual Scientific Meeting of The Gerontological Society of America
Web: www.geron.org

November 21

Sydney, Australia
Emerging Researchers in Ageing
Web: www.aag.asu.au/conference2006.htm

November 22-24

Sydney, Australia
AAG 39th National Conference: Diversity in Ageing
Web: www.aagconference2006.com

November 27-30

Innsbruck, Austria
European Conference on Ageing. Joint meeting with LINKAGE
Web: www.econag2006.com

2007 Calendar of events

March 14-18

Salzburg, Austria
8th International Conference Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Diseases: Progress and New Perspectives
Email: adpd@kenes.com

April 12-13

Wellington, New Zealand
Carers Summit
Email: Sara@carers.net.nz

June 18-21

Montréal, Canada
International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons (TRANSED): Benchmarking, Evaluation and Vision for the Future
Web: www.tc.gc.ca/pol/en/transed2007/message_TC_e.asp

July 5-8

St. Petersburg, Russia
6th European Congress of Gerontology
Web: www.gerontology.ru/congress2007

September 3

Christchurch, New Zealand
IANA(International Academy of Nutrition & Aging) Pre-conference Seminar (in association with NZ Dietetic Association Conference)
Web: To be advised

September 5 & 6

Adelaide, Australia
IANA (International Academy of Nutrition and Aging) 4th International Conference
Web: To be advised

November 14-16

Hamilton, New Zealand
NZAG Conference – Ageing: The Everyday Experience
Web: To be advised

Editor's Desk

The next Newsletter will be circulated in December 2006.

Send contributions to:

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Membership

Any person interested in promoting the aims of the Association can be a member of the NZAG. This may include members of the public, health professionals, care staff, administrators, managers, representatives from organisations involved with the wellbeing of older people, and academics interested in gerontological research. If you are interested in becoming a member, contact one of the following people:

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