

## INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF AGING

By Michele Hendrix

At one time or another, each one of us ask ourselves the question; “How long will I live - 70, 80, 90?” Aging is not always easy but it is often thought provoking. Now is the time to adopt a lifestyle so each of us can be the best we can be as we age, to continue to contribute to our communities and be seen as a solution rather than a cause of problems.

*“70 percent of physical aging and 50 percent of cognitive aging is every day - what we eat, whether or not we exercise, to what extent we make a difference, to change the downward slope of the aging curve.”*

(Dr. John Rowe and Robert Kahn, *Successful Aging*)

Change is part of the story of aging. That’s why as we are aging we must take ownership of our health. As we look at *Insights into the Later Years* we recognize that today people are living longer and have healthier lifestyles. With the many advances in medicine and medical treatments our views on aging are also changing. Increased longevity can be attributed to improved screening methods, surgical procedures, devices and medications – as well as better access to health information. We must also remember that tending to the spiritual needs of those who are aging is just as important as maintaining their physical health. Very simply, the aging process can also affect the spirit and therefore one's spiritual life.

Still, living a longer life doesn’t necessarily mean enjoying a better quality life. About 30 percent of our health and wellness is genetic and about 70 percent is due to lifestyle. Thinking there’s nothing you can do about the rest of your life is not true. For years we have heard about healthy eating, exercise, and physical activity. We now understand that how we choose to age can put us at greater risk for health issues. That is why today many boomers and older adults recognize and strive to be active, engaged, involved, and healthy well into their advancing years.

There have been many advances in studies that examine ways to support healthy aging and prevent or delay the onset of the many age-related diseases that can lead to a diminished lifestyle. These ongoing studies help to promote the increase in longevity and an active life expectancy free of disability in our latter years. It is up to the aging individual to apply that to their current lifestyle.

In the past our early and middle adult years did not often effectively prepare us for becoming an older adult. The unfamiliar role of retiree and then later transitioning into a senior was often viewed as another challenging task confronting many seniors. Now retirement is viewed as the time to begin identifying what gives meaning and satisfaction to our lives. Identifying new sources of fulfillment, happiness, study, reflection, prayer, and opportunities for service, as we are aging. Then taking action to develop and define a new role and purpose for our lives in an active and appealing aging process.

The world is facing a situation without precedent: We will soon have more older people than children, and more people at extreme old age than ever before. A better understanding of the changing relationship between health and age is crucial if we are to create a future that takes full advantage of the powerful resource inherent in older populations.

Sources:

United Nations. *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*. Roy Buchinsky, MD Internal Medicine Specialist and the Director of Wellness at University Hospitals Case Medical Center, February 2016.

McArthur Foundation, *Insights on Aging and Health, Successful Aging of Societies*, John W. Rowe, Spring 2015

***Ms. Michele Hendrix*** has served two terms as the President of POAMN. She has worked for over 25 years to advocate, educate, involve, and motivate people in the process of aging and self-care; and to recognize the connections among church, health care, non-profit, community, state, federal, and local agencies while encouraging adults of all ages in managing their self-care, chronic conditions, respite, and caregiving roles. Michele has focused her work on intergenerational and interfaith programs for adults, evidence-based health promotion, ministry programming and development, respite for caregivers, and fall-prevention programs. She is a Deacon, Stephen Leader, Caregiver Specialist, Speaker and Trainer with expertise in Older Adult Ministry, Intergenerational Ministry, and Caregiving for all ages.