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Conference Abstract

Trends in health care reform

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Abstract

Ageing is a phenomenon which is becoming one of the leading priorities of Europe and of the European Commission. The ageing of the population of Europe is a fact which is evident given the trend towards healthier, more active and longer lives.

There are four main demographic trends (EC, 2006), specifically the average number of children per woman is below the population replacement number of 2.1 per woman for industrialised countries, and this rate is falling further; the decline in fertility in recent decades followed the post-war baby boom which is today causing the bulge in the size of the population aged 45 to 65 years; the dramatic increase in life expectancy since 1960; and the fact that immigration, although primarily of working age, will not compensate for the joint effect of low fertility and increased life expectancy.

More generally, ageing, as emphasized by EC communication on Disability Action Plan (2005), is strongly correlated with disability prevalence: nearly 30% of people belonging to the age group of 55-64 report a disability and 63% of people with disabilities are older than 45. This is the so-called phenomenon of compression of morbidity. There is a need to measure these elements independently and against the background of the clear conceptual framework of health provided by WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health - ICF (WHO, 2001; Leonardi et al., 2006). Based on a theoretical framework that defines disability as the interaction of a health condition with contextual factors, ICF has been tested since its approval in 2001 in several projects, such as the EU project MHADIE (www.mhadie.it).

Taking all this into account, including the notion that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that mandates the need for clear data as an essential precondition for rights-based policy (Art 31), the Collaborative Research on Ageing in Europe (COURAGE in Europe-www.courageineurope.eu) attempts to respond to this need by developing an ICF-based instrument for measuring health, health-related outcomes and determinants of disability for an ageing population.

The survey aims to provide objective and evidence-based prevalence trends and is being currently conducted in Finland, Poland and Spain. The survey is administered to approximately 2500 persons aged 50+ years, and 1000 persons aged 18-49 years in each country. For older persons with disabilities especially, the presence and availability of assistance and support from both informal and formal care providers, have profound implications for their continued maintenance in the community, as well as the profile of the kinds and degrees of social participation (Fratiglioni et al, 2000). By the same token, the built environment in which the individual lives and functions, can increase or decrease the impact of disability and can be a significant factor in the development of several disabling symptoms, in particular mental health symptoms.

By means of these measurement instruments, COURAGE in EUROPE methodology will produce comparable data on non-fatal physical and mental health outcomes, disability, quality of life and well-being, social cohesion and role of built environment in ageing population This is what COURAGE tool aims to do as it offers objective and evidence-based prevalence trends, related to both quality of life and well-being outcomes, as well as, the role of health determinants such as the built environment and social cohesion - for which original instruments have been developed.

Understanding ageing and its determinants will have a considerable impact on public health policies in Europe and worldwide. It will lay the foundation for longitudinal study on ageing in Europe by providing a methodology for the so called European DIS-AGE-disability and ageing-trend. COURAGE in EUROPE Project: A European Commission project funded within the Seventh Framework Programme Number HEALTH-F2-2009-223071.

Keywords

health care reform, aging, disability, WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. COURAGE in EUROPE

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