

5. CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Prepared by: Care of the Elderly Committee 1998/99

Abstracts

The number and proportion of older persons in Malaysia is projected to increase. Recognising this, MMA established a Care of the Elderly Committee as early as 1987, which apart from conducting surveys, has also been active in disseminating knowledge and skills on care of the elderly. This position paper reviews the background information of older persons in this country and describes strategies for MMA's future role in contributing effectively to the care of the elderly in Malaysia.

Introduction

Ageing is a normal and inevitable process of growth, yet there is still little awareness of the issues and problems relating to the aged especially in developing countries. The relative proportion of the elderly in the developing world is still small when compared to that in the developed countries, but in the coming decades, there will be a marked rise in the rate of growth of the elderly in both absolute and proportionate terms, consequent to the rapid decline in mortality rates and a fall in birth rates.

Demographics

Malaysia, with a land area of 329, 758 square km., and comprising 13 States and 2 Federal Territories and a projected population of 21,665,500 in 1997.

While 37.64% of the population is under 15 years of age and 58.43% are between 15-64 years, those above 65 years constitute 3.93% (United Nations Source, 1991).

Of the projected elderly population of 802, 100 (i.e. aged 65 years and above) in 1997, the male elderly number 364, 100 while the female elderly number 438, 000. (Statistics Department Malaysia, 1997).

While the World Health Organization (WHO) defines the elderly as 65 years and above: by Asian Standards, the senior citizen status is bestowed once a person reaches the age of 60.

Currently, people who are above 60 years make up about 1.2 million or 5.9% of Malaysia's population. (Statistics Department Malaysia, 1997).

WHO defines an ageing population as when the elderly population of 65 years and above of a country reaches 7% of its total population.

By 2005, Malaysia will enter the ranks of the "Ageing Nations of the World", with 1.7 million or 7.2% of our population being senior citizens.

Projections for the year 2020 estimates that there will be 3.2 million senior citizens, out of a population of 32 million, in the country; or in terms of percentage, it is expected to reach 11.3%.

Further background characteristics of the elderly in Malaysia is given in Appendix I.

According to the United Nations source, 1993 the number of older persons aged 60 years in Malaysia is thus projected as follows:

1995	-	5.9% total population or 1.8 million
2000	-	6.5% total population or 1.45 million
2020	-	10.9% total population or 3.22 million

The Government's Role

The Malaysian Government has recognized the fact that as the ageing population grows, health needs for this segment of society will also increase. As such, the health services had started integrating the needs of the elderly population towards the end of the 6th Malaysia Plan (1995) and at the same time it will be expanded under the 7th Malaysia Plan.

Under the 7th Malaysia Plan, the government has allocated RM52 million for the setting up of geriatric units in all major hospitals of the country. There is, at present, only one such unit set up in Seremban Hospital. Part of the strategic plan is to get a core number of health personnel trained in this area to cater for the rising demands and needs of the growing elderly population.

As for the number of Geriatricians in the country, they number 4: there are 2 Geriatricians at the University Hospital, 1 Geriatrician at Seremban Hospital, and the fourth is in the private sector.

There are also two Inter-Ministerial Councils under the National Council of Ageing, to coordinate the inter-sectoral approach in assessing the various needs of the elderly and implementing different services towards this elderly population.

The NGO's Role

The NGO's perform an important role in the care of the elderly. While their scale of operation may still be modest, it is expected to grow rapidly in the future. The partnership between the NGOs and the Government is likely to be strengthened, with the Government channeling more resources to the elderly through the NGOs. As the traditional support system loses its effectiveness, the NGOs can be expected to play a greater role. The programmes and services of the NGOs are likely to become more diversified and specialized in the future.

MMA's Role

The Malaysian Medical Association has always been interested in the welfare of the elderly in the country. A committee was set up in 1987 to study issues and offer recommendations pertaining to the care of the elderly in the country.

At the 30th MMA AGM held in March 1990, the following resolution was passed:

1. The elderly have the same right to care, welfare and respect as other human beings.
2. The MMA recognizes that it is the physician's responsibility:
 - i) to protect the physical, social and psychological interests of elderly patients;
 - ii) to prevent elder abuse and neglect.

The "*Care of the Elderly in Malaysia*" report was published by the MMA Committee in 1992. It is a comprehensive report, covering all the factors related to the health and general well being of the elderly. The hope was expressed that the MMA would take the initiative in planning a blue-print for the elderly towards the year 2020, in close consultation with the relevant government and non-government organizations in the country.

A report on "*the Health Status of the Elderly in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur*" was also published in 1995-1996 by the Committee for Care of the Elderly. This report was based on a survey conducted by the committee and it was funded by the MMA Foundation.

Objectives

Based on the MMA reports, previous minutes of meetings held by the committee and available literature, the position of the MMA Committee of the Care of the Elderly would be:

1. To follow-up and, where possible, to follow-through with the 30 recommendations as summarized in the 1992 MMA report. (Please refer to Appendix II).
2. To educate and create awareness about the elderly, their needs and problems. This should be directed at the public, medical and health personnel. Schools too should be targeted through collaboration with the Health Education Unit of the Ministry of Education.
3. To look into the training of carers/caregivers.
4. To come up with possible guidelines for nursing homes and day-care centres and familiarize ourselves with other relevant acts.
5. To look into areas for research in caring for the elderly.
6. To explore the feasibility of setting up a Geriatric Foundation.
7. To look into possible ways of creating a 'network' between the various government and non-government organisations involved in caring for the elderly to ensure better communication and co-ordination of programmes.

Strategy

A. Working together with the other agencies:

- i) Within the organisation:
 - the other MMA committees, in particular,
 - Health Insurance Committee
 - Plantation Medicine Committee
 - Women's Health Committee
 - National Health Plan Committee

- Ethical Committee
- Adolescent Health Committee
- Accident Prevention Committee
- The State MMA branches.

ii) With the Government Departments/Ministries:

- Ministry of Health (through the National Council for the Elderly)
- Ministry of National Unity and Social Development (Department of Welfare Services)
- Ministry of Transport
- Ministry of Housing
- Ministry of Education (including Universities)

iii) With the Non-Government Organizations:-

- Gerontological Association
- NASCOM
- USIAMAS

- B.** To conduct/assist in training programmes related to care for the elderly. In April, 1998, a Seminar/Workshop on "Training of Caregivers" was conducted by MMA's Care of the Elderly Committee. On 19th July 1998, the 1st Training for Caregivers of the elderly was held in University of Malaya in conjunction with the Gerontological Society of Malaysia and MMA's Care of the Elderly Committee.
- C.** To help in dissemination of information on matters pertaining to care of the elderly via the mass-media, CME talks, information materials and articles to be published in the MMA newsletter. Members of the Care of the Elderly Committee have given talks on care of the elderly since July 1998.

References

1. *"Care of the Elderly in Malaysia" - report by the MMA Committee, 1992.*
2. *The Health Status of the Elderly in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur - a report on the survey conducted by the MMA committee for the Care of the Elderly (1995-1996) and funded by the MMA foundation.*
3. *The Health of the Aging Malaysian: Policy Implications - by Paul C Y Chen.*
4. *Non-Governmental Response to Ageing Issues - Paul Cheung.*
5. *Draft-Cadangan Program Kesihatan Warga Tua Dan Pelan Tindakan-Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (1997).*
6. *"Care of the Elderly in Malaysia" - Report by the MMA Committee 1992.*

Definitions

Gerontology - study of ageing

Geriatric Medicine - branch of General Medicine concerned with the clinical, preventive, remedial and social aspects of illness in elderly people.

- Ageing* - is a progressive state, beginning with conception and ending with death. Associated with it are certain physical, social and psychological changes.
- Ageism* - the prejudices and stereotypes that are applied to older people sheerly on the basis of their age.