Preparing to Care for the Baby Boomer Wave that’s Coming

BY MICHELLE BRUBAKER

Ten thousand baby boomers turn sixty-five every day. By 2029, the entire generation born between 1946 and 1964 will be at least that old. What happens next concerns millions of Americans.

Advancing age is broadly associated with declining cognitive, physical, and mental health. In a new study of older adults living independently in a senior continuing care facility, researchers at University of California San Diego School of Medicine analyzed how distinctive factors, such as wisdom, loneliness, income, and sleep quality, impact—for good and bad—the physical and mental functioning of older persons.

Writing in the May 8, 2019, issue of American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, a research team headed by Dilip V. Jeste, MD, principal investigator of the study, senior associate dean for Healthy Aging and senior care and director of the Center for Healthy Aging at UC San Diego, found that physical health correlated with both positive and negative cognitive function and mental health.

Specifically, cognitive function was significantly associated with physical mobility, wisdom, and satisfaction with life. Physical health was associated with mental well-being, resilience, and younger age. Mental health was linked to optimism, self-compassion, income, and lower levels of loneliness and sleep disturbances.

“Continuing care senior housing communities are important sites for studying and promoting health in older adults,” said Dr. Jeste. “Most people focus on diseases and risk factors, like old age, unhealthy diet, and lack of activity. These are important, of course, but we also need to focus on areas that make up the whole person.

“Psychological traits like optimism, resilience, wisdom, and self-compassion were found to be protective, while loneliness seemed to be a risk factor. An eighty-five-year-old can be functioning better than a sixty-five-year-old due to protective and risk factors.”

In modern society, said coauthor Danielle Glorioso, LCSW, executive director of the Center for Healthy Aging at UC San Diego, aging persons do not necessarily receive the support of younger family members who can serve as caregivers.

“Younger family members have jobs and children to take care of,” said Glorioso. “So older adults often have to choose between staying at home and feeling lonely versus moving to a more supportive and socially engaging senior housing system. This becomes an important but complex decision impacted by a large number of factors, including financial cost of the senior housing.”

A popular model of supported senior housing provides a continuum of care, from independent living to assisted living to full-time care for significant physical and cognitive impairment. For the majority of continuing care senior housing facilities, costs increase as residents transition to greater levels of assisted-living.

“Delaying these transitions through facilitating resilience, mental health, and social connectedness is a main goal,” said Dr. Jeste. “Our findings shed light on areas that need to be a focus for seniors to live full, enriched lives.”

Continued on page 2
2019 Stein Public Lecture Series

Human Longevity: Symposium of the UC San Diego Center for Healthy Aging

Thank you to everyone who participated in this year’s Symposium! Please visit our website at aging.ucsd.edu to watch the materials and videos from the day-event. The event included the following:

Welcome
David Brenner, MD, Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences, UC San Diego

Opening Remarks
Sandra Brown, PhD, Vice Chancellor for Research, UC San Diego

Talk: “Longevity and Healthy Aging”
Dilip V. Jeste, MD, Senior Associate Dean for Healthy Aging and Senior Care, Director of the Center for Healthy Aging at UC San Diego

Talk: “Approaches to Human Longevity”
J. Craig Venter, PhD, Founder, Chairman, and CEO of J. Craig Venter Institute

Panel: CIAO (Client on Aging Outcomes Study)

Panelists:
David Brenner, MD, Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences, UC San Diego
Salvatore Di Somma, MD, PhD, Professor Medicine and Director of Emergency Medicine, University of La Sapienza Rome, Italy
Dilip V. Jeste, MD, Senior Associate Dean for Healthy Aging and Senior Care, Director of the Center for Healthy Aging at UC San Diego
Mohit Jain, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Pharmacology, UC San Diego
Anthony Molina, PhD, Chief of Research, Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology, Department of Medicine

Robert Kisilman, PhD, Director of UC San Diego’s Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center Neuropathology and Biomarker Cores

Talk: “Heart Health: Keeping the Heart Healthy in Later Life”
Pam Taub, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Director of Hannah and Gene Steg Cardiac Wellness and Rehabilitation Center, UC San Diego

Panel: Successful Aging: Insights from Local Successful Agers
Moderator:
Danielle Girios, LCSW, Executive Director, Center for Healthy Aging, Stein Institute for Research on Aging, UC San Diego

Panelists:
Natalia Josefowitz, PhD, Author, Poet, Retired Professor
Hedges Capers, Actor, Director, Musician

BY MAJA GAWRONSKA

“I transferred into UC San Diego undergrad from community college in my early twenties, then had to apply twice to be accepted to my major school,” says UC San Diego senior medical student David Carlson. “After that, and being treated for a brain tumor as a med student, I know nothing is guaranteed but almost everything is possible.”

David has been awarded the Jackelyn Harris Stein Institute Medical Student Geriatric Award.

The Jackelyn Harris Stein Institute Medical Student Geriatric Award

Baby Boomer Wave continued from page 1

One-hundred and twelve residents participated in the study, with a mean age of eighty-four. Sixty-eight percent were female; sixty-nine percent possessed a college education; forty-one percent were married; and seventy-two percent reported total annual incomes exceeding $50,000.

Dr. Jeste said more longitudinal studies involving diverse samples of older adults are necessary to determine if psychosocial and other variables are potential risks or protective factors related to cognitive, physical, and mental health and diseases.

“The eventual goal would be to develop new health-focused interventions based on such research. Senior centers in the community should incorporate activities that address physical, social, and mental aspects. We can all do something to improve and strengthen the quality of life of our aging population.”

Coauthors include

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IN THE NEWS

“Physical, Mental Health of Seniors Linked to Optimism, Wisdom, Loneli- ness,” higheredtimes.com/Dilip.V.Jeste, MD, and Danielle Girios, LCSW

“Tests an Astronaut and Twin Brother Highlight Spaceflight’s Human Impact,” Scientific American, features Brinda Pana, PhD

“How Mental Health Care for the Aging Is Falling Short?,” Next Avenue, features Dilip V. Jeste, MD, and Ellen Lee, MD

“Education Won’t Help Much When It Comes to Dementia, Study Says?,” CAN, features Dilip V. Jeste, MD

“What Happens to Our Brains as We Age?,” San Diego Jewish World, features Dilip V. Jeste, MD

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• $25,000 funds an aging-related pilot project for a postdoctoral fellow.
• $10,000 funds a research project for a postdoctoral fellow.
• $5,000 supports a graduate student for one quarter.
• $3,000 funds the filming of one public lecture.
• $2,500 funds one issue of our newsletter.
• $500 funds twenty-five participants in our successful aging study.
• $350 funds a high school student for a week, including a stipend and all supplies.