

Elderly Care in Myanmar

The Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA 58.16 “Strengthening active and healthy ageing” which recommended wide ranging actions for Member States and WHO. It suggested to develop, implement and evaluate policies and programs that promote health and ageing and the highest attainable standard of health and well-being for the older citizens.

Being a developing country in Asia, Myanmar is also facing the emerging issue of growing number of older people. Since most of the people in Myanmar are rural people, "Rural ageing" becomes an important issue. In Myanmar, older people are supported mainly by their families. With the changing social and economic conditions, care for the older people became the issue that goes beyond the respective family and health sector control. So, the Governmental organizations including Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, NGOs like Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association and some INGOs like Help Age Korea are cooperating and collaborating for the comprehensive care of older people in Myanmar.

With the aim to promote active and healthy ageing, the Ministry of Health implemented the elderly health care project in Myanmar since 1992-93. It was initiated in six townships and expanded in four to six townships yearly. Being an integral part of the primary health care, Health Care for the Elderly became one of the sub programs under the umbrella of Community Health Care program since National Health Plan (1993-1996). This programme is based on comprehensive health care; promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative care. By the end of year 2013, it has been implementing in 161 townships where the Township and Station Hospitals and Rural Health Centers open clinics for specific care of older people on every Wednesday.

Elderly Health care program aims to provide at least 20% of the ambulatory elderly with geriatric clinic services through primary health care approach in the project townships. It also encourages home based geriatric care through families, health volunteers and Non Governmental Organizations. So, advocacy and training of health staff, voluntary health workers, family members and community volunteers are major activities of the program.



Medical conditions that are mostly seen among elderly people in Myanmar are high blood pressure, chronic lung diseases, musculoskeletal problems, heart diseases and diabetes mellitus. In addition to general health care, oral care, eye care and advice for fall prevention are also included in the services provided at elderly clinics since those are the common problems of the older people. By screening at the elderly clinics, those who need cataract surgery, eye glasses and dental treatments could be referred to the respective township hospitals. For being active and healthy, life style modifications are also included in counseling the older people and are trained and encouraged to do regular physical exercises that are suitable for them.

Depending on the availabilities, health screening procedures for high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and other important ones like osteoporosis screening, cancer screening were done, appropriate treatment were initiated and encouraged them for regular follow up. Proper referral system was set up in elderly clinics for those who need further treatment at tertiary centers. Rehabilitative services were also provided to the people with mobility problems, joint problems and post stroke patients.

Nutritional counseling and health education to the patients as well as family care givers are the important functions of elderly clinics. It is noted that elderly clinics also serve as places for relieving loneliness as elderly people can meet each other and group recreational activities can also be initiated. For those older people who need social care or home-based care, the community volunteers, NGOs and INGOs are playing an important role.

Every year, 1st October is regarded as the International Day of Older Persons and the theme of this year's 24th commemorative day is "Leaving No One Behind: Promoting a Society for All".

