SGS Past Presidents' Symposium – 2012
Twenty-Five Years after Rowe and Kahn: Successful Aging Revisited

Introduction

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In the more than forty years since I started studying gerontology as a college undergraduate, I have seen many concepts used to frame or describe positive outcomes for people in later life.

These have included concepts of adjustment and adaptation, quality of life and quantity of life (longevity and active life expectancy), conscious and productive aging, and many others.

One of the most influential conceptualizations and ensuing research was begun by Rowe and Kahn in the 1980s and detailed in their 1998 book *Successful Aging* which made the results of a decade of research funded by the MacArthur Foundation accessible to the public. Their model focuses on three cornerstones of successful aging: avoiding disease; maintaining high cognitive and physical function, and engagement with life and they contend that if defined actions are taken, people can delay or prevent the common diseases of old age.

Their work has helped shift the perspective in the field of aging from models which focus on decline and the down side of health issues (e.g., disease, dysfunction and dependency) to the more affirming and now widespread focus on the upside--successful and healthy aging.

We now have hundreds of studies from which to extrapolate to make the later years better, for ourselves and others. Those of us in applied fields know the emphasis on information and activities and programs for promoting wellness and positive aging is palpable and in perhaps some ways even overly prescriptive.

In today's symposium, three distinguished scholars will present their perspectives on successful and healthy aging and challenge us to think about the values, goals, definitions, measures, findings and directions for future research and practice.

Dr. Jim Mitchell, Professor of Sociology at East Carolina University and Past President of SGS will talk about Optimal Aging: Opportunity in Cultural Context. Our second presenter, Dr. Mary Altpeter, is a nationally known leader on issues of healthy aging on the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Altpeter will talk about The Systems Change Movement for Healthy Aging. And our third speaker, Dr. Lennie Poon, psychologist, noted expert on centenarians, and like Dr. Mitchell also a Past President of SGS, will describe a new NIA-funded project in which he is chairing a team of eight distinguished scholars to examine the field of successful and healthy aging to identify gaps and directions for new research and practice, especially addressing issues of public health.

We ask that you hold your questions and comments to the end as we have set aside time to hear from you. Our goal is to engage you in a discussion of the ideas presented and your observations and thoughts about the state of the field of successfully and healthy aging and what you consider needed and promising areas for exploration and program/policy development.