SGS Past Presidents' Symposium - 2012

# Twenty-Five Years after Rowe and Kahn: Successful Aging Revisited

Presenters: Jim Mitchell, PhD, East Carolina University; Mary Altpeter, PhD, Institute on Aging, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Lennie Poon, PhD, University of Georgia; Moderator/Discussant: Luci Bearon, PhD, North Carolina State University

**Abstract**

One of the most influential conceptualizations of successful aging was put forward by Rowe and Kahn and given wide attention because of their 1987 article in *Science* entitled "Human Aging: Usual and Successful." Their 1998 book *Successful Aging* presented a conceptual model and research findings to counteract the persistent notion that aging is inherently a process of decline. Their work directly or indirectly influenced many in the field of gerontology, reinforcing or expanding our vision of the positive possibilities of later life and encouraging us to develop and implement lifestyle and programmatic interventions and to measure positive outcomes. This symposium includes presenters that challenge us to think about our concepts, our goals and our foundational literature on successful and healthy aging. Audience members will be invited to join in the discussion and to participate in a new national project to inspire thoughtful dialogue and new directions in research and practice on successful and healthy aging.

**Brief Biosketches**

**Jim Mitchell**

Jim Mitchell is a Social Gerontologist who, since 1980, has been a faculty member at East Carolina University in Eastern NC. His research and writing in applied gerontology is based on primary data describing and explaining preventive health behavior among community-dwelling older people in that region. Jim was Director of the University's Center on Aging for 25 years and Associate Director of the UNC Institute on Aging for 12 years. He is a Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America, Founding Fellow of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, former Editor of the *Journal of Applied Gerontology* and Past President of the Southern Gerontological Society.

**Mary Altpeter**

Mary Altpeter, PhD, MSW, MPA is a Senior Scientist and co-lead of healthy aging initiatives at the UNC-CH Institute on Aging, and Adjunct Assistant Professor in the UNC-CH School of Public Health. Currently, Dr. Altpeter is Principal Investigator (PI) of the CDC-funded, fourteen-year grant, NC Healthy Aging Research Network (NC-HAN), which is part of a national interdisciplinary network of seven campuses, and PI of the Arthritis Foundation Walk With Ease in the Workplace intervention study. She also serves as a program evaluator for the NC Division of Aging and Adult Services for the REACHII and REACH-OUT interventions for caregivers of older adults with Alzheimer's Disease and a technical advisor for the CDC-funded grant, Measuring Impact of Multi-Component Interventions to Prevent Older Adult Falls and Assessing Elements of Sustainability and Scalability, working with three states to evaluate dissemination of three interventions: Tai-Chi, Stepping On, and Otago. In addition, Dr. Altpeter serves as a technical consultant for the Center for Healthy Aging of the National Council on Aging, the resource center for health promotion for the Administration on Aging, focusing on translation of evidence-based health promotion research into provider practice. She has co-authored or edited numerous provider training modules, manuals and issues briefs on health promotion and aging that are available at the NCOA's Center for Healthy Aging Programs website: http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/center-for-healthy-aging/.

**Lennie Poon**

On July 1, 2011 Leonard W. Poon retired as an active professor and became Emeritus Professor and Institute Director at the University of Georgia with the goal of reflecting and applying what he had learned from his 40+year career in engineering, psychology, and gerontology. His career began with a B.S. in engineering from San Jose State University (1966), three years of working in the aerospace industry (Lockheed Missiles & Space, 1966-69), M.S. (1971) and Ph.D. (1972) in experimental psychology from the University of Denver, and a post-doctoral fellowship in gerontology, psychophysiology, and neuropsychology at the Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development at the Duke University Medical Center (1972 - 74).

**Poon (continued)**
He began his work in gerontology as Associate Director and Director of the Mental Performance and Aging Laboratory (1974 – 1985) at the Veterans Administration Medical Research Service, and as Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, and Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston. His research focused on normal and pathological cognitive changes in aging and the assessment of dementia of the Alzheimer's type in the early stages. In the subsequent 26 years he directed the Institute of Gerontology at the University of Georgia, Chair of the Faculty of Gerontology, and as Professor of Public Health and Psychology. He developed gerontology training, research, and outreach at the university, state, national, and international levels, and his primary research in the last twenty years has focused on genetics, neuropathology, functional capacity, and adaptation of the oldest old (Georgia Centenarian Study) funded by the National Institutes of Health as well as the impact of exercise on cognition.

Dr. Poon published more than 170 peer reviewed papers, chapters, and 15 books, and received more than 30 research grants from NIMH, NIA, NICHD, VA, and AARP. He was elected fellow of the American Psychological Association, American Psychological Society, Association of Gerontology in Higher in Education, and the Gerontological Society of America. He is also an honorary member of Sigma Theta Tau, an international nursing research society. Dr. Poon was a Fulbright senior scholar to Sweden, a senior research scholar to Japan, as well as a consultant to projects in Belgium, Italy, England, Germany, and France. Since 1994, he has been the executive director of the International Centenarian Consortium, a research consortium among researchers from nine countries. He served at three NIH study sections for more than 12 years. Among his research awards are the NIA Special Research Award, VA Medical Research Service Achievement Award, North America Leader in Psychogeriatrics, Southern Gerontological Society Academic Gerontologist Award. For life-time achievements, he received the AGHE Tibbitts Life Time Achievement and Seltzer Service Recognition awards, Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society Love of Learning award, the UGA Distinguished Research Professorship, and finally a Philosophiae Doctorem Honoris Causa (2000), from Lund University, Sweden, in recognition of his life-time work in gerontology.

As an Emeritus Professor, Dr. Poon is currently teaching a course to freshmen about living, dying, and things their mother never taught them. After his retirement in 2011, he received a grant from NIA to lead an international multidisciplinary team to define the public health mandate on healthy and successful aging. He continues to write grants, publish, and work with colleagues on designing research associated with NIH funded projects as well as giving lectures around the world. He travels the world with his wife, Marie, with a video documentary team to record stories of centenarians and share findings from centenarian researchers. He is looking forward to spend more time to share lessons on what he had learned in his 40+ years studying aging and living.

**Luci Bearon**
Luci Bearon, PhD, CFLE, is Associate Professor and Adult Development/Aging Specialist in the Department of 4-H Youth Development and Family & Consumer Sciences at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. She received her doctorate in sociology from Duke University in conjunction with the Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development. After a variety of teaching/research positions, including 7 years as Associate Director for Education and Evaluation of the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC) at the Durham VA Medical Center, she joined the faculty at NCSU in 1995 as an Extension Specialist for NC Cooperative Extension to provide support to county Extension educators on issues related to older adults and their families. Her Extension focus areas are successful and healthy aging, family caregiving for older adults, and grandparents raising grandchildren. She teaches gerontology in the Masters program in Family Life and Youth Development, serves on the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging, has been an expert panelist for the Rosalynn Carter Institute of Caregiving, is a Fellow of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education and is the 2011 recipient of SGS' Applied Gerontologist Award. Her publications related to subjective well-being, quality of life and successful aging include the book *Quality of Life in Older Persons: Meaning and Measurement* co-authored with Linda George in 1980, a 1989 article in *The Gerontologist* entitled "No great expectations: The underpinnings of life satisfaction in older women" and a commentary piece in the *Forum for Family and Consumer Issues* on "Successful aging: What does the good life look like?"http://www.ncsu.edu/ffci/publications/1996/v1-n3-1996-summer/successful-aging.php. With colleagues at NC State, she co-authors Extension curricula for older adults, including *Aging with Gusto!* (1996) and *Successful Aging* (2006).