

New Beginning Coalition (NBC) Meeting NOTES (shared by: Florence Wong)

Date: 5/17/22 9:00-10:30am (Zoom)

Topic: "Older Adults and COVID"

1st Presenter: Dr. Ayati (Geriatric Medicine, Stanford affiliated); mayati@stanford.edu

- Pandemic has been traumatic for patients and healthcare workers
- Why are older adults so highly at risk?
 - o Frailty
 - o Multiple co-morbidities (e.g., kidney disease, respiratory ailments)
 - o They are on lots of medications, many of which affect the coating of the lungs (e.g., medications for pain, anxiety, and incontinence), which then makes it difficult to clear the lungs
 - o Cognitive impairment, which leads to not understanding why hand washing is important
 - o Difficulty hearing (e.g., when a nurse says, "Put your mask on", they don't hear)
 - o Economic setbacks are more serious for older adults due to lost savings, difficulty re-entering the workforce, and age discrimination
 - o Health services have been disrupted and increased isolation causing anxiety
 - Many don't understand how to utilize telehealth
 - Postponed doctor visits has led to more advanced illness when they finally do see a doctor
- Ageism, racism, and classism
 - o These are all worse if you are an older adult of color
 - o Globally, medical services preferring to treat younger people first if services are being rationed, despite the actual pre-existing wellness of the patient
 - o People of color are less likely to hold jobs that allow them to work from home, so they risk higher frequency of exposure to virus
- Isolation
 - o Causing depression and memory loss
 - o Increased suicide rate
 - o Increased use of psychotropic medicines
 - o Loss of neurons from decrease social interaction
- To maintain neurons, important to have **Learning, Physical Activity, and Positive Attitude**
 - o Increases neuronal creation and maintaining hippocampal neurons (memory center)
 - o Social interaction is very important
 - Recommends discontinuing isolation of seniors now that we have good vaccines and boosters due to adverse effects of isolation
- Next steps: The world population is aging, living longer
 - o Proportion of seniors globally increasing to 22% by 2050
 - o Pipeline of caregivers from Asia and Africa will decrease because not enough young people
 - This affects the ability of US seniors to find caregivers
- Fewer caregivers available overall
 - o Salaries will have to increase a lot to attract help
 - o Increased competition between Western countries for the same caregivers

- Need to increase the number of medical specialists for the aging population; medical profession not keeping up with future demand
- Need to re-think medical interventions: quality of life is more important than medical procedures that are very costly and do not meaningfully extend life
- More investment needed into needs of the aging population rather than investing in anti-aging technologies (which gets a lot of funding currently)
- Post-COVID lessons
 - Deficiencies in care and preparation for a pandemic
 - Need increased funds for research and support
 - Learning good/better precautionary measures
- Benefits of COVID lessons
 - Learned that staying home if sick is important
 - More seniors learned to be tech savvy
 - Respiratory disease is highly contagious
 - Family and intergenerational connections grew stronger
 - More intergenerational programs were created during the pandemic and should continue post-pandemic
 - Importance of seniors having healthy lifestyles to prevent premature death in next pandemic
- Conclusion
 - COVID won't disappear, so we should weigh pros and cons of isolation, especially if someone is boosted/vaccinated
 - Treatments for COVID are much better and more available now
 - At this point, isolation is worse than getting COVID for most seniors

2nd Presenter: Dr. Curtis Chan (SMCo. Deputy Health Officer)

- Greater than 90% risk protection with full vaccination plus 2 booster shots
- Currently in new wave of COVID
- Need to promote overall wellness
- Vaccination is shown to decrease risk for long COVID, but this is still being studied
- Being fully vaccinated plus being in well ventilated room offers very high protection
- Whenever possible, keep windows open and have good HVAC system (MERV-13 filter)
- Staff who work around seniors should be required to be fully vaccinated
- The county is unlikely to have health mandates again
 - Institutions can make their own requirements though
 - SMCo. In "high" transmission rate currently
- Dr. Chan's comments and recommendations mostly referring to adult day programs rather than in-patient or full-time care settings

Bernie Mellott (SMCo. Ombudsman program) made a comment: Seniors in residential programs showed significant improvement in mood after interacting with a robotic animal (cats, dogs); trying to get funding for more robotic animals; state still deciding on requirements for staff who work in full time care institutions.