

International Short Term Training Course in Geriatrics

Two O.T.'s, Bernadette Falzon, Dip. O.T., SROT, from St. Vincent de Paule Residence for the Elderly, and Janette Massa, Dip. O.T., SROT from Zammit Clapp Hospital, attended a two week course in June 1996 on Geriatrics. The following are their comments and observations.

The International Institute on Ageing this year organised its 6th short term course in Geriatrics comprising of several tutors giving lectures, all related to ageing.

In all there were 29 participants from all over the world, ever as far as Western Samoa. Different professions attended the course including, Occupational Therapists, Nurses, Assistant professors, Physiotherapists, Medical Doctors, a Dentist, and Directors of various hospitals.

Among these 29, 14 were Maltese and 2 were Occupational Therapists.

Issues and topics covered were:

Biology of ageing: Age is not a disease and cannot be prevented. Being old depends on individual circumstances and environment. Definition of "elderly" varied from country to country with life expectancy and retirement ages being used as indicators rather than definitions of elderly.

Behavioural and Social aspects of Ageing: The role of the family in the transmission of values pertaining to family care of the elderly was discussed. The role of the family in the demographic transition occurring in developing countries was emphasised.

Epidemiology: There was a general consensus on the most leading causes of morbidity and mortality in both developing and developed countries, illustrating a common trend.

Health Promotions and Disease Prevention: The more the three intercomplimentary dimensions of health education, maintenance of health and disease prevention overlap, the more health promotion is achieved. It was also agreed that inequalities early in life will be translated into ill health at old age.

Research Methods and Skills: For proper planning, research methods and skills are required. One has to see what one is looking for (research), how one will proceed (methods), and by what means (skills). The purpose of any research is to gather data, reflect upon interpreting it and finally design a way forward.

Health Services for the Elderly: Health services require a lot of teamwork. The importance of a rehabilitation team was emphasised. Health services start at the level of care givers, to private practitioners as well as services at primary health centres.

A Spanish researcher is presently researching change in the lifestyle and well being within the care givers (primary care giver is usually a daughter) of clients suffering from stroke. The findings are already remarkable although the work is not complete yet. Practical guidelines on how to conduct research and how to handle the difficulties that might crop up, were also featured.

During the course there were also group sessions; groups had to tackle a problem or a situation presented by the lecturer. Through such groups it was noticed that professionals of different levels around the world have similar problems and come up with similar solutions.

Finally, the most important part of the course, especially for the foreigners, were the site visits. Their feedback was positive and they felt that Malta, when compared to other countries, has a high standard as regards care of the elderly.

Recommendations put forward:

* Use of functional status of elderly, not chronological age for purposes of planning health services for the elderly.

* Implementation of disablement prevention to primary, secondary and tertiary level, and also link prevention of disability to rehabilitation.

ADDITION OF QUALITY TO LIFE AND NOT MERELY
addition of years to life through improvements
in the health and socio-economic aspects of
the elderly.

* Making healthier promotion relevant and
practical to people by providing facilities that
promote health.

* A multidisciplinary approach is essential to
the provision of health care services for the
elderly.

* Creation of a prosthetic environment is es-
sential for the elderly, e.g. telephones with big
push buttons, special door knobs.

* Prevention of disability can also be main-
tained by training the care givers in prevent-
ing infection, the social neglect, and isolation,
all of which lead to mental problems.

EXERCISE AND PLANNING AS REGARDS THE WAY TO AGE
living of the aged should be considered. Proper
housing, easy accessibility to medical centres and
healthy government policies should be implemented.

Overall the two weeks were very stimulating and
proved to be an excellent learning environment. A
significant amount of knowledge was gained from
this unique experience within an interesting mix of
backgrounds, cultures and disciplines.

The International Institute on Ageing is also on the
Internet. For all those that would like to make con-
tact, the address is as follows:

<http://www.inia.org.mt>