

LENTEN SERIES 2019, REFLECTION I – Practical Aspects to Ageing

To start this year's Lenten devotions, I have been asked to share with you on the practical aspects of ageing, with some focus being on how these features are related to your church life and activities. Some of these pointers of course, are also applicable to the younger members here with us today. But as we see our congregations age in keeping with the trend in populations all over the world, the special considerations needed by this group must be acknowledged and addressed.

Last year we started the series on health and wellness by highlighting the definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Practitioners shared their expertise on various issues, including the very contemporary cannabis use for health purposes as well as concerns that will always be relevant – prostate cancer and managing chronic illness. The series was ended by sharing basic self-management skills related to having a chronic illness. To quickly recap general concepts shared were:

- ✓ Firstly, **ACCEPTANCE** of your health challenges are needed
- ✓ Recognising **YOU ARE ABLE – I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Phil 4:13).**
- ✓ Understanding **YOUR HEALTH IS UNIQUE** and requires time to understand and care for.
- ✓ **YOU ARE THE BEST ADVOCATE** for your health. Highlighted in the first reflection last year by Dr Goulbourne was that 'your health is your responsibility'
- ✓ **EDUCATION IS ONE OF YOUR BEST TOOLS – SELF EMPOWERMENT AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS** The more you know, the more you can grow in your health journey
- ✓ **Then we looked at WHAT CAN YOU tangibly DO TO IMPROVE YOUR OUTCOME WITH A CHRONIC ILLNESS. This included:**
- ✓ Compliance with medication and other regimes.

- ✓ Manage your medications – know the drugs you take. Do things to help you day to day – place by toothbrush, where you sit to eat, alarms on your phone.
- ✓ Address side effects of the medications with your doctor
- ✓ Lifestyle changes – DIET, EXERCISE, REST, STRESS REDUCTION, NO SMOKING, LIMIT ALCOHOL and CAFFEINE
- ✓ Beware of depression or other mood disorders associated with your illness and address early.
- ✓ MAKE THE BEST USE OF RESOURCES
- ✓ NHF/JADEP cards, Drug Serv/discounts, go to distributor for the drug, labs ask for discount
- ✓ Have a support network, eg support groups – he who feels it knows it, work, community
- ✓ REWARD YOURSELF! Part of fostering good psychological health is: when you do good and achieve goals, do something for you.

To continue along a similar theme this year we are going to look at some of practical aspects of ageing.

In terms of how our bodies function, a number of changes naturally occur in the body with advanced age. Changes in the cardiovascular system include a decrease in the volume of blood being pumped by the heart, blood vessels lose elasticity and fatty deposits build up in arteries, leading to elevated blood pressure and atherosclerosis. Decrease in autonomic nervous system responsiveness also affects heart rate and blood pressure. The lungs show decrease capacity, slower expiratory rates and impaired gas exchange. Reflexes slow down and coordination is affected. Muscles, tendons and joints lose their strength. Degenerative changes in joints and loss of muscle mass affecting locomotion. Decline in bone mass results in some persons becoming shorter. The eyes experience more difficulty seeing for various reasons, less tears are produced and lens become cloudier (cataracts). There is also reduced hearing

and memory loss. In addition to all of this, our immune system weakens with ageing making us more susceptible to illness, such as infections and cancers.

Partly because of these changes as well as the acquisition of chronic illnesses, older persons tend to require more pharmaceutical agents. However, with increased age there are also changes in response to drugs due to decrease liver blood flow and decrease metabolism of drugs in the liver. Additionally, there is prolonged excretion of the waste products from drugs as kidney clearance decreases.

This means that overall our bodies have less reserves as we get older, so that minor insults disturb the delicate balance of their bodies that in our youth would be addressed through mechanism that maintain equilibrium and normal health. In the real world this translates to events such as fainting of our older members during services.

So with all these factors considered, we also have to remember that our religious behaviours also affect our physical health. Various spiritual activities and practices can either bring benefit or accentuate the physical decline of ageing. Some of these practices include ones that are integral to our Lenten period – fasting, sacrifice and meditation.

Fasting was initially practiced for religious reasons. In recent times, health benefits are being purported especially using intermittent fasting, suggesting what's good for our spiritual health as also good for our physical health. Claimed benefits of fasting apart from weight loss include:

1. Strengthening of the immune system
2. Improved blood pressure, total and LDL cholesterol, blood triglycerides, and blood sugar levels,
3. Prevention of cancer, Alzheimer's disease and brain damage due to strokes.

But is fasting for everyone? **1 Cor 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.**

Believed benefits of **Meditation** include

1. Better management of stress, anxiety and depression
2. Increased immunity
3. Lowered blood pressure
4. Better sleep
5. Improving age-related memory loss and lengthens attention span

If we look at **Sacrifice** – A common question is what are giving up for Lent? Healthy sacrifice can benefit individuals physically, spiritually and financially. But when choosing our sacrifice, this also requires taking into consideration other factors which impact your health. For example, one may choose to give up meat, but this may lead to vitamin B12 deficiency. However, the elderly, persons taking certain diabetic medications and antacids for reflux already have a higher risk of vitamin B12 deficiency. So, it may be prudent to give up something else if these conditions apply to you.

So how can we further minimize unpleasant consequences related to ageing that may impact our church life. As Anglicans, we love our early morning Sunday services. This sometimes means we don't have a lot of time before leaving out for service. With age we slow down further. To minimize unpleasant events, it is important to remember these points:

Individual Preparation for Sunday Morning Service

1. You may not have time to prepare a full breakfast before reaching to Sunday service but you should at least have something light to eat before leaving your home eg fruit, yogurt. This is especially so if they are diabetic. You could consider starting meal preparation the night before to ease the stress and time taken in the morning to ensure you have something to eat.
2. At a minimum everyone should make sure they are hydrated before leaving their homes in the morning. This could prevent low blood pressure leading to

lightheadedness and passing out during the service. Remember if you have an infection – cold, gastroenteritis, it is even more important to stay hydrated. Water is best, coconut water also a good option. ~8 glasses a day.

3. If diabetic check your fasting blood sugar before leaving home. Walk with sweets or gum to prevent blood sugar from dropping too low
4. If hypertensive and not under good control - check blood pressure before leaving your home
5. If you are not feeling well, you may have to sit at times when you would usually stand or sit closer to a window. If very lightheaded, you may need to even lie down and elevate your legs for a few minutes
6. Carry a list of your chronic illnesses and medications to each service
7. Have emergency contacts/numbers in purse/or worship books
8. Have contact for your GP or regular treating physician on hand. Let someone know once you don't start to feel well, so that if you worsen, persons will be ready to act
9. Be aware of public health concerns and take appropriate actions. Currently, we have Dengue resulting in deaths. Be diligent in the use of mosquito repellent. We worship in an open building which gives easy access to mosquitos.

Congregational Preparation

Every now and again, a member falls ill at church. Readiness and timely intervention will not only help persons health-wise but also alleviate the anxiety of other concerned church members. Here are a few things we could consider to do as a congregation:

1. The Chapel could forge a relationship with an ambulance service or could have persons designated to transfer the ill to the hospital if they are not accompanied by a relative or friend.
2. Invest in a First aid kit. Apart from usual contents, we should also include smelling salts for fainting, fast acting sugar containing products eg, small sachets of sugar, honey, condense milk, sweets for diabetics who become hypoglycemic, aspirin for chest pain and Panadol for other forms of pain.
3. Acquire a blood pressure monitoring and glucometer with strips

(I would be happy to work with the other medics and any other congregants interested in donating time and resources/funds to organize these initiatives, as well as be open to other ideas.)

I will close with a word of advice, not for you to become complaisant and believe that because of the health challenges associated with ageing, that everything deficiency in your health is just old age. Get things check out to make sure serious illness is not missed and also to access any chance of improving your quality of life. Lastly, I will leave you by quoting **3 John 1:2 Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.**