

EDITORIAL UVODNIK

GERIATRICS – STANDARDS AND THE FUTURE OF HEALTHCARE FOR THE OLDER ADULTS

GERIJATRIJA – STANDARDI I BUDUĆNOST ZDRAVSTVENE ZAŠTITE ZA STARIJE OSOBE

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Introduction

In today's society, where life expectancy is steadily increasing, geriatrics has emerged as a pivotal field of medicine dedicated to addressing the needs of older adults. This specialty offers integrated support that spans prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation, while respecting the physical, mental, and social dimensions of ageing. In Europe, geriatrics has evolved as a subspecialty within internal medicine, grounded in the principles of comprehensive geriatric assessment (CGA), which enables effective care and resource optimisation for the older population. While geriatrics is formally recognised in several European countries, others are still in the process of establishing and enhancing standards in both education and clinical practice.

Specific Approaches and Methods in Geriatric Medicine

At the core of geriatric practice lies the comprehensive geriatric assessment (CGA) – a multidisciplinary diagnostic process specifically tailored to the needs of older patients. CGA encompasses not only medical but also functional, psychosocial and environmental domains. The assessment team typically includes a geriatrician, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, and psychologist, who collaborate to develop an individualised care plan. This approach is associated with improved clinical outcomes, reduced hospitalisation rates, delayed institutionalisation, and prolonged functional independence among older adults.

Professional and Educational Standards

Education and continuous professional development are critical to ensuring high-quality care in geriatrics. The European Geriatric Medicine Society (EuGMS) strives to harmonise educational standards across Europe, advocating for the inclusion of geriatrics as a mandatory subject in both undergraduate and postgraduate medical curricula. These educational initiatives aim to equip future physicians with knowledge of the physiological process of ageing, the principles of CGA, and the ethical issues uniquely relevant to geriatric medicine, such as palliative care and quality of life assessments.

Postgraduate training in geriatrics typically spans at least five years and includes both theoretical instruction and practical clinical experience in primary and acute care, geriatric psychiatry, rehabilitation, and palliative care. This comprehensive training equips professionals with the necessary skills to understand the unique challenges of the older population, and encourages a holistic approach when working with older patients.

Challenges for the Future

The future of geriatrics involves addressing several challenges. One of the most urgent is motivating young professionals to pursue a career in this field, given the growing demand for qualified geriatric personnel. Another critical need is the development of research programmes that address the specific health concerns of older adults. Geriatrics can foster interest in this specialty by promoting scientific research and

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raising public awareness of the challenges that older people face.

Moreover, the existing healthcare systems must adapt to provide longitudinal, coordinated, and proactive healthcare. This type of care requires continuous support and an integrated network of social and health services capable of effectively responding to the needs of the older population.

Conclusion

Geriatrics plays a fundamental role in improving the health and quality of life for older adults, with

comprehensive assessment, multidisciplinary care, and tailored professional education making its core components. To ensure the sustainability and growth of this specialty, it is essential to increase public awareness about the importance of geriatric medicine and encourage young doctors to dedicate their professional careers to this field.

With continued investment in educational and professional standards, geriatrics will be well-positioned to meet the complex needs of the older population and contribute to the development of integrated support system that ensures long-term healthcare for older patients, improving both their health and quality of life.

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