

Formosa, M. (Ed.). (2018). *Active and Healthy Ageing in Malta: Gerontological and Geriatric Inquiries*. Malta: BDL Publishing, 320 pp. ISBN 9789995799410

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Extraordinary demographic changes are occurring in the 21st century with increasing ageing of the populations around the world. Mediterranean countries are among the longest living of the world. This extraordinary success of humanity brings with it many challenges to build a future with healthy seniors. The present remarkable increased life expectancy is most probably the result of better living conditions, medical progress, and better health care organization. The World Report on Ageing and Health, one of the most important WHO documents in recent years, confirms the crucial importance of the maintenance of functional ability throughout life. Malta is one of the fastest ageing countries in the European Union. In the next 30 years the United Nations foresee an increase of 6.4 and 6.3 years for males and females, to reach 85.1 and 89 years of life expectancy, respectively.

The excellent book of Prof. Marvin Formosa - *Active and Healthy Ageing in Malta* - explores the actual situation in Malta, and testifies the impressive number of social and health care services that have been introduced in the last few years in Malta, but it is also a thoughtful analysis of the possible interventions to be implemented in order to promote functionally independent ageing, as well as of the strategies to help delay, prevent, or reverse the frailty process. This book documents the progress in living conditions, in social and health care but also shows the future directions to challenge the problems and the opportunities of the demographic challenge, and is also an important tool for policy makers, to help the routing of resources and political interventions.

Active and healthy ageing is a societal "duty", but it is also a personal responsibility. Everyone eventually has the old age that deserves. This makes us think on the opportunity, at any age, to care for the own ageing. Lifestyle and behaviour across the life course (e.g., physical exercise, adequate nutrition, non-smoking) are fundamental. It is for this purpose that we all need to build and disseminate a culture of "Active and Healthy Ageing". In parallel, preventing

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diseases that increase disability, and delaying or preventing frailty and dependency, needs to become a core focus of public health actions, in all the nations. The duty of the societies and of the national health systems is to create the conditions and the services that allow people to age successfully, fight frailty, and avoid social exclusion in case of disabilities.

The book shows that Malta is trying to address all these points. A pension system has been recently reformed resulting in significant innovations with a strategy that allows old citizens an adequate but sustainable pension income, and reduces the gender discrimination. Social changes have been implemented to consent provision of support, security, and care, in order to improve social network for older gay men, with positive results in overall wellbeing, with the ambition to make Malta become an old gay friendly nation. Malta has also recently revised and modernised the legislation on elder abuse. This is a very important achievement since this is an increasing diffuse and underreported problem in all continents. In this regard, the creation of an office where older abused person may report any form of abuse deserves recognition.

The policy on long term care (LTC) for older adults has evolved and reoriented in the last few years, moving from a protective one based largely on the medical model to community-based services aimed to encourage and support ageing in place. Over the years also the role of the state has changed moving from being the main provider of LTC to include contracting and purchasing of services. However, the role of residential care in Malta is still greater than in many other European countries. Quality of life in residential care has received increasing attention, and assistance has been reoriented from the hospital model to one that privileges autonomy, privacy, dignity, and psychological health of the residents, trying to minimise isolation, encouraging socialisation, and limiting the use of physical restraint. An interesting initiative that has been implemented in Malta is a residential respite care programme for caregivers with the provision of residential beds in four different sites (3 facilities in Malta and 1 facility in Gozo) that may be offered for a maximum of three weeks, up to three times a year. In these facilities older persons are engaged and empowered in a number of activities, trying to maximize the functional independence of the recipient of care.

Particular attention deserves the Malta national strategy for dementia and the dementia intervention team: persons diagnosed with dementia that enter the programme will have a care plan developed by a multidisciplinary team specialized in dementia care management that includes a dementia care coordinator, a practice nurse, and an occupational therapist. A psychologist may also be part of the core team. The team discusses with the clinician and assesses short- and long-term goals, and facilitates access to the appropriate services for the person under care. The programme had a tremendous success and the demand for the programme is growing, probably requiring future increase in resources. Communication training programmes have been started for informal caregivers of persons with dementia in rehabilitation hospital, to help reducing caregiver stress and burden.

Among other interesting programmes that have been implemented aiming to guarantee healthy ageing in Malta, the book reports the important results of an oral health programme in older persons, of a nutritional assessment as an important component of health among older adults, the approaches to implement nutritional interventions, and a programme aiming to

guarantee assistance to persons with heart failure and undergoing a coronary artery bypass graft. Other specific programmes have been developed for the end of life and palliative care that guarantee artificial nutrition and hydration, although some bioethical aspects need further elaboration.

Malta has started a process to elaborate a Vulnerable Person Act that would increase the concern for the important issue of vulnerability in its social, psychological and medical aspects. This act should include procedures to report mistreatment, safety plans at home, education of the public to the concept of vulnerability in the older persons, and a support network for the person and the carers. It is also noteworthy that the University of Malta is implementing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in gerontology, geriatrics and dementia studies.

Altogether, this remarkable book by Prof. Formosa shows the notable number of initiative and programmes put forward in Malta to protect vulnerable persons and their caregivers. It also highlights how these policy initiatives and these University research and studies are going in the right direction to improve the capacity of building an active ageing society in Malta.

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