

SUGGESTED HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR OLD AGE HOMES

Dr Vinod Kumar, Emeritus Professor

St Stephens Hospital, Delhi

HEALTH STATUS AND THEIR DETERMINANTS

Under the 2007 Act, each old age home is to accommodate 150 indigent persons. A scheme to manage these homes regarding different types of services of an adequate standard needs to be put in place. One such service is connected with health for which we need to first broadly know the old age problems in this field as given below.

1. Inadequate nutritional status due to various reasons
2. Proneness to respiratory, urinary, intestinal, skin & other infections including TB
3. Multiple disabilities like problems of mobility, vision, hearing, memory, teeth etc.
4. Non-communicable diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease etc.
5. Proneness to falls and injuries and many other diseases.

Determinants:-

1. As per prevailing mindset of elderly persons, failing health and dependency are accepted as a part of old age and no effort is made to achieve fitness and independence.
2. Meagre incomes, ignorance and illiteracy, unsafe homes, pollution and insanitation are big contributors to health morbidity.
3. Social factors like loneliness, bereavements, loss of self esteem and resulting depression take their own toll on the health of the elderly.
4. Inaccessibility to health care facilities due to various reasons and difficulties in managing one's own medications resulting in improper treatment and adverse drug reactions.

HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR OLD AGE HOMES

(i) Stage of planning and construction

1. Specially earmarked spaces for medical examination, walking & exercise, yoga, meditation, discourses and meetings and reading rooms.
2. Rooms and dormitories with well partitioned cubicles should have magic eye and other facilities to identify the visitors and have emergency call devices.

3. Ramps with very gradual slope, non slip floors, handrails on both sides to be provided in addition to stairs and lifts. All verandahs and stairs to have handrails.
4. Light should be adequate and well distributed but not extensively bright. There should be measures to cut off the glare.
5. Bathrooms and toilets should have non slip flooring material and their doors should have locks that can be opened from outside as well. Toilets should be of the western type.
6. Electrical switches to be large with embossing to identify for fan, light, bell etc.
7. Keys for doors and cupboards should be of different patterns and of large size so that they can be identified by touch.
8. Any furniture should not have sharp edges.

(ii) Stage of maintenance and operation

1. Provision of 24 hours nursing care with facilities for storing essential drugs, medicines for routine ailments and oxygen cylinder. A list of these things is given in the end.
2. Visiting doctor with experience in geriatric medicine at least twice weekly.
3. Liaison with neighbourhood doctors for emergency calls and nearby hospitals for dealing with medical emergencies and hospitalization if need arises.
4. Facilities for health education for the residents regarding healthy life styles like balanced diet, exercise, avoidance of tobacco etc. and self care practices to achieve healthy aging.
5. Facilities to encourage psychosocial wellness by social networking, meditation, stress reduction etc.
6. Alternate medical therapies like ayurveda and other indigenous systems to be made available also.
7. Special aspects to look after elderly females to be concentrated upon because these old age homes are likely to have considerable number of them who are often poorer and socially marginalized.
8. Professional emphasis to be laid on judicious medications by the residents on issues such as understanding proper directions for using the medicines, checking their contents, avoiding their duplication and that medicines are never to be hoarded by any patient and never to be shared with any one else.

Suggested list of medicines and equipments in old age home (to be completed)

Medicines: For fevers, pain, stomach upsets, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, cough and wheezing, dehydration, antibiotics etc.

Equipments: Stethoscope, BP instrument, thermometer, weighing machine, torch, X-ray viewing box, arrangements for injections etc.