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How should we, as a society, meet the care needs of an ageing population?

In recent years the rate of sociocultural development has increased. With discussions about implicit and explicit discrimination such as sexism and racism being brought to the foreground, the political stance on such issues is being challenged more than ever. However, one of the most overlooked forms of discrimination within modern societies, ageism, remains very much existent but is frequently ignored because the implications are often not as apparent as other forms. Such discrimination largely manifests itself through the neglect of older citizens within society.

Firstly, for the care needs of the elderly to be met, they need to be understood. One of the main challenges faced by older citizens is social exclusion. Poverty, poor health, low social awareness, lack of transportation and limited access to services are all factors that contribute to reduced social participation of the older generation. Whilst it is expected that the level of social integration may decrease as a result of functional impairments, it should be continuously encouraged and welcomed. Intuitively, reduced social participation would lead to the underrepresentation of the concerns of the elderly. Hence, it is essential that the voice of the older generation is accurately represented by allowing opportunities for them to participate in the decision-making processes behind the issues that concern them. This then begs the question: how can we increase the integration of the elderly within our modern societies?

Social participation of older adults could be heightened by ensuring and enabling supportive environments for them to pursue interests, allowing them to build upon existing life achievements. Support groups could be set up offering a range of physical activities and games in order to encourage and maintain fitness, good nutrition and mental health. In addition to this, activities that allow elderly people to engage with younger generations. Doing this will help to increase the appreciation of the older generations, so that when the younger generation are in positions to make decisions that affect the elderly, they can do so empathetically.

Political participation of older adults is crucial and both the younger and older generations have the right to equally express their needs and interests. Some countries, such as Russia and Ukraine already have existing political parties that directly represent the interest of the older generation, as well as coordinating bodies that discuss and address issues relating to the senior citizens. Such bodies can be integrated within the British government to encourage open dialogue about the issues facing the older citizens and potential solutions to address them.

The average life expectancy in the UK has increased steadily by 10 years in the past 50 years. Further increase can be expected with continuing advancements in medicine and technology. However, an ageing population presents new challenges,

and is the most significant driver for the continuous evaluation of the health and care priorities of the government. In recent years due to many economic factors, there have been major cuts to the National Health Service. Whilst the longevity of the older generations is generally sought after, unfortunately due to said cuts an unacceptable number of those years are being spent in poor health with multiple long-term conditions, frailty, dementia and social care needs.

With a rapidly growing and ageing population, one potential solution exists, the implementation of "smart-home" technology to assist elderly and or less-abled adults to live a life of safety and independence in the comforts of their homes as opposed to hospital environments. Not only would this reduce the pressure currently placed on aged-care facilities and other health resources, but it would promote and encourage a better quality of life.

Such an initiative would require the government to raise millions of pounds in funds so that some of the technology could be covered by the NHS, and integrated within the homes of their patients. This would free up space within general hospitals, so that patients with more pressing conditions could receive adequate treatment. However, this is not to say that smart technologies would be used to replace the need and significance of district nurses, but to ensure that care services that can be subsidised by the use of smart technologies would increase the chances of those who need personal care of receiving it.

In conclusion, this essay has considered the issues faced by the elderly as a result of societal neglect and has put forth possible solutions to this growing concern. However, there is still more to be done to ensure the elderly age with the grace they deserve.