

# The Pursuit of Late Life Happiness

# Late Life

- Frustration and resentment for some.
- Happiness and fulfillment for others.
- Why? How do folks find meaning and joy in their last years?

# Happiness

- Sense of well-being.
- Life satisfaction.
- Sense of value or self-esteem.
- “Finding it a pleasure to be alive”.

# Wisdom

- Knowing what is of value in life
- Ability to understand and deal with fundamental problems of life.
- Recognize and comprehend the basic complexities and uncertainties of life
- Allows you to assess your limitations, the finitude of your life, your death.
- Confucius:
  - "Experience is the bitter manner of achieving wisdom"
  - "The noblest way to achieve wisdom is by reflection"

# How do we become wise?

- Easier to acquire wisdom in older age.
- Experience.
- Time, opportunity, and inclination for reflection:
  - Who you are.
  - What is of most value to you.
  - What actions best meet your needs and priorities.
- Your ability to look inward, focus on your goals, identity, and personal plans in life, is fostered as you age.

# Wise Person

- Knows what is important in life
- Reflects on events in a thoughtful and dispassionate manner
- Can accept life's contradictions and injustices.
- Deals with others in an open and trusting manner.
- Knows self and accepts self as she/he is.

# Ryff - Happiness

- Self Acceptance
- Autonomy
- Environmental Mastery
- Purpose in Life
- Personal Growth
- Morale

# What Older People Associate with Late Life Satisfaction

- Self reported health
- Supportive social network
- Able to care for self
- In control of life
- Socially active
- Sense of purpose
- Goals in life



# Health and Quality of Life

- 224 patients with terminal (6 month life expectancy) lung disease, heart failure, or cancer.
  - Quality of life
    - 40% - good
    - 17% - couldn't be better
- Chronically Ill individuals who see their physicians at least 10 times per year and hospitalized for at least one week per year.
  - Quality of life
    - 37% - about as good as it could possibly be

# Dealing with Illnesses

- Most important adaption in late life.
- Most difficult.
- How can one sleep after receiving a diagnosis of cancer?
- How can you think of anything else when your life is so threatened?

# Illness and Aging

- You collect diseases as you age.
- Part of the price of a long life.
- You cannot spend your life waiting for the other shoe to drop.
- Obtain treatment and get on with your life.

# Coping with Illness

- Put things in perspective.
- Focus on the “big picture” of your life.
- Put your problems in:
  - The context of your whole life
  - Your achievements and life roles.
  - Your place in your family and cultural heritage.
  - The legacy that you would like to leave.

# Anxiety

- Anxiety about your diagnoses and illness will only add to your problems.
- You will all get ill and die someday.
- Worry about your health and longevity will only add gloom to your day.
- Apprehension magnifies the impact that a condition has on your life.

# Impact of Medical problems on aging

- These problems can:
  - Dominate your conversations
  - Affect your interactions
  - Take over your life
- No way to spend your last years
- You must adjust to problems – roll with the punches.
- Calm the concerns of your family.
- You have made it to late life – you are playing with “house money”

# How to Adjust?

- Focus on the present:
- Horace:
  - “Carpe diem quam minimum credula postero”
  - “Pluck the day, don’t worry too much about the future”
- Cherish each day; don’t worry too much about the future.
- The future is unpredictable – concern about it does you no good.
- What is important is to be happy today. Life is lived in the present. Tomorrow is unknown and yesterday is no more.

# Lessening Concern

- Direct your attention to others – don't dwell on your own problems.
- Focus on your ultimate goals and values
- If appropriate for you, use your spiritual resources and reflection.
- What impact will your approach to illnesses have on those who follow you?
- The way in which you live your life is more important than the diseases you face.



# Nina's Lessons

- Take each day as it comes.
- Don't worry about the future.
- Get pleasure out of the simplest of activities.
- Make the most of every ounce of energy you possess.
- Find satisfaction in meeting everyday needs.
- Be able to laugh at yourself- don't take yourself too seriously.

# Interpersonal Relationships

- Your sense of who you are, and your concept of yourself, is dependent on the interpersonal relationships that you experience in your family, social networks, and culture.
- Those individuals who have been significant in your growth, development, maturity, and later life contribute a great deal to how you see yourself,
- You are only fully defined when you interact with others.
- The need for human contact is fundamental to the formation of your self in relation to others.

# Relationships

- Much of your life satisfaction is found in your relationships with others.
- Strong and positive relationships with family and friends will enrich your last years.
- Staying connected is a lifelong effort, which takes planning and energy.
- Strong relationships can develop without spouses or large families

# Roles in Late Life

- What roles give you satisfaction and fulfillment?
- Which of your capabilities meet the needs of family and community?
- Find levels of goals and capabilities feasible for your present level of function.
- Keep gap between expectations and achievements narrow.
- As long as you can relate to family and friends, you still have roles to play – advocate, mentor, source of support.
- You serve as an intergenerational link, and living source of family traditions.

# Independence

- Key to control over life.
- Ability to care for oneself very important to self-esteem.
- Helps to maintain meaning in life.
- Independence should be considered a high priority
  - Major risks can be taken to maintain independence.
  - Extensive resources should be applied in the home to allow continued independence.

# Steps in Mobility

- Getting out of bed
- Transferring from chair to standing or chair to chair
- Walking
- Ascending and descending stairs

# Rate Limiting Factor

- What step is limiting independence?
- What is impeding that step?

# Getting Out of Bed

- Older people need to use arms to get off bed
- Any upper extremity injury or condition can limit this step
- Do you need to sit at side of bed before getting up?
- Do you need a side rail to get out of bed?



# Transferring out of a chair

- Most important step in independence
- Is this step limited by:
  - Balance
  - Inability to use arms to push off
  - Knee pain or immobility
  - Muscle weakness
  - Hip disease
  - Back pain

# Walking

- Balance is key
- Must get leg from behind you to in front of you
  - Bend knee
  - Flex hip
  - Dorsiflex foot
- Is walking limited by:
  - Pain
  - Weakness
  - Joint immobility
  - Neurologic Disease
  - Fear of falling

# Falls

- Common problem for older individuals
- Impact:
  - Increase mortality
  - Worsen function
  - Often cause for institutionalization
- Multiple component programs can limit risk:
  - Physical therapy
  - Balance exercises
  - Assistive devices
  - Safe home environment

# Stairs

- Hip and ankle muscles and knee important for ascending stairs.
- Knee function – descending and ascending stairs
- Falls more likely when descending stairs, particularly when carrying large objects (such as laundry baskets)
- Need:
  - Railings on both sides of stairs
  - Good lighting
  - If carpeted – well secured

# Maintaining Independence

- Listen to your body
- If you notice any problem with your mobility, work with your physician to identify and treat the cause of the difficulty.
- Minor symptoms (such as knee pain on descending stairs) can progress to major limitations (inability to get out of a chair).
- Make sure that your living environment meets your level of function.
  - Bathroom
  - Stairs
  - Furniture

# Adjusting to loss of function

- What adjustments can help you respond to the changes of aging?
- Refusing help will make it more difficult to keep you in your own home.
- You must get over yourself , put aside your pride and concern with appearances, and accept the help that you need.
- Well trained athletes learn to “play within themselves”.
- Make appropriate revisions to your living space.
- Adjust your goals to changes in your condition.
- Life satisfaction – attaining the standards that you set for yourself.

# Autonomy

- Sense of worth and value of efforts are very important to late life satisfaction.
- Difficult to find fulfillment if you have no sense of control
- Perception of control is key to:
  - Feeling of competence
  - Value of contributions
  - Continued sense of role in family and community.

# Sense of Autonomy

- Internal sense of who you are.
- Ability to evaluate yourself by your own personal standards, without the need to look to others for approval.
- Your sense of turning inward for direction increases in later years.
- Try to choose or create an environment in which you can have a sense of control.



# Autonomy and Risk

- People who have had major roles in communities, corporations, and institutions turn over control of their lives to “discharge planners”
- No one should be in a place where they are miserable to give their relatives “peace of mind”
- Competent people should always be able to determine how much risk they are willing to accept in their living environment.

# Risk Avoidance

- What is your family worried about?
- What is the worst thing that can happen to you?
- What greater risk can there be than a discontented life- devoid of meaning, fulfillment, and satisfaction?
- Your family needs to pay attention to your needs and desires – to what you value most.

# Providing and Receiving Care

- If you need assistance, you should accept it willingly, with gratitude and grace.
- If you are giving care, your attitude is as important as your care. Your care should be welcome, generous, and thoughtful.
- Care, provided with love and devotion, supporting the independence and self-esteem of the recipient, is one of the greatest gifts one human being can provide to another.

# Care Recipient

- Being a care recipient can be difficult
- Should be cooperative and understanding, while appreciating the assistance that is given.
- Avoid feeling guilty or being a burden to others.
- Life brings what it brings.
- Accept care when needed and given with devotion.
- When older persons can accept their need for care, given in a generous and meaningful manner, they can find dignity and richness in their last years.

# Sense of Value and Self-Worth

- Feel that you are involved in worthwhile activities.
- Meeting the standards that you set for yourself.

# Search for Self-Worth

- Need for individual autonomy and personal freedom.
- Need to feel that your choices, thoughts, and actions are freely chosen
- Sense of authority over the circumstances of your life.
- A feeling of competence and control.

# Self Esteem

- Ability to form strong unions with others.
- Mutual trust and love.
- Ability to achieve intimacy with others.
- Sense of guidance to those who follow you.
- Acceptance of who you are.
- Comfortable with your past.

# Feeling Good about Yourself

- In the last years, as in every stage in life, your satisfaction with life depends greatly on how you feel about yourself.
- In making choices in the last years, make sure that these decisions will maintain and enhance your self-esteem.



# Planning for the Future

- Helps to maintain some control over your life.
- Increases life satisfaction.
- Setting a course in the face of a finite amount of time left.
- “Used to plant perennials – now I plant annuals”

# Future Plans

- Your choices must be clear to family and physicians.
- What are your treatment preferences?
- Those who might have to make decisions for you need to understand what brings meaning and fulfillment to your life.
- What are your values – what is important to your self-esteem and contentment?

# Personal Growth

- Continue to develop as an individual.
- Maintain your curiosity.
- Continue an ongoing sense of creativity.
- Each new day brings new experiences.
- Ability to adapt to these experiences and the changing environment of your life to continue to form who you are.

# Adjusting

- You adjust most effectively to the limitations of aging if you redefine your goals and expectations and increase your chances of meeting new standards.
- Focus on activities most important to you.
- Forego efforts on less important areas.
- Conserve emotional, as well as physical, energy and expend it only on those areas which have the highest priority for you.
- A life of experiences should teach you to discriminate those truly essential activities from the less important endeavors of daily life.

# Coping

- Many of your coping resources improve with age.
- Your confidence, social support, acceptance, and problem solving abilities are all enhanced by life experiences.
- You use these resources to:
  - Adjust to life's challenges
  - Maintain a sense of independence
  - Gain control over your daily life.
  - Improve your sense of self-esteem and identity.

# Influence on Others

- As humble as you may be, and as insignificant as you may feel, you play an important role in the lives of others.
- You influence those around you.
- The example of how you live your life, and take your exit from it, will have an impact on many.
- Make every attempt to maintain your identity – to be who you are, to the end.

# Losses

- The death of a spouse, child, sibling, or close friend can be devastating, and can color your last years.
- The ability to deal with these losses has a great impact on the quality of your late life.
- Most bereaved individuals experience a grief reaction, a normal response to such a loss.
  - Nostalgia
  - Bothersome thoughts of lost one.
  - Sadness, yearning for loved one.
  - Spontaneous crying, need to talk about loved one.

# Losses (cont.)

- Resilient individuals have learned how to deal with losses.
  - Can accept death.
  - Can see positive side of a difficult situation.
  - Can meet the challenges of life..
  - Good insight
- Each person deals with loss in her or his own way.
- Discussion must be careful and sensitive.
  - Serve best as listener.
  - Know when and if a bereaved person wants to talk.
  - Never remind someone of a death.



# Dealing Well with Losses

- Deal with life's problems as challenges to meet.
- Keep control of life.
- See positive aspects of any situation.  
Accept help from family and friends.
- Channel emotional energy into positive tasks.
- Loved one had taught bereaved how to carry on – can't disappoint her/him now.

# Uncertainties

- Concerns about the future – what is coming?
- Uncertainties can become overwhelming and paralyze us with anxiety.
- How do you deal with uncertainties?
  - Will you be able to adjust to worsening health, less function, memory loss, less ability to care for yourself?
- Problems should produce strategies for management.
- Perseverance in the face of these challenges will give guidance and inspiration to those who follow.

# Impact

- Whatever happens in your last years, you have made your impact, you have left your footprint.
- Outlined the stories that will be told about you.
- You are who you are.
- Your job during your last years is to maintain your identity, through thick and thin.

# Leaving a Legacy

- Can add meaning to your last years.
- You want to preserve others' memory of you.
- Your legacy is a model of how life should be lived.
  - Moral values represented
  - Response to life's challenges.
- You receive values and approaches to life from your parents, hone and revise them, and then pass them on to your children and grandchildren.

# Those who do well in late life

- Realistic about the nature of their last years.
- Know that the end is near.
- Know that their capabilities will lessen.
- Focus on others.
- Stay connected to people and institutions with major roles in their lives.
- Strong sense of self
  - Know who they are.
  - What gives them satisfaction.
  - What they need to maintain personality and integrity.

# Those who do Well (cont.)

- They make sure that they continue an effective role with their families, as well as with friends and institutions in which they have been long active.
- They see their value as being members of extended families, religious organizations, neighborhoods and cultures.
- They trust their judgement
- They feel good about themselves
- They keep control of their lives to the end.

# The Pursuit of Happiness

- Learn to live with illness.
- Maintain and enhance relationships.
- Maintain independence.
- Keep control of your life
- Stay active.
- Find purpose and meaning in each day.