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Conference Abstract

Aging with an existing physical disability

Lisa I lezzoni MD, MSc, Professor of Medicine Harvard Medical School, Mongan Institute for Health Policy, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Correspondence to: **Lisa I lezzoni**, E-mail: liezzoni@partners.org

Abstract

Significant advances in medical technology and increasing social and environmental supports throughout communities now allow persons with even severe disabilities to live into late-middle and old age. Disabilities are diverse, ranging from cognitive to mental health to sensory to physical impairments. Each different type of disability has specific implications for the experience of aging; notably, many persons have more than one type of impairment, complicating matters. In the United States, 54 million persons currently live with disabilities, and the numbers with grow substantially with the aging "baby boomers" as persons become newly disabled by the consequences of chronic conditions. This talk, however, focuses on persons with physical disabilities who either have had their disability since birth or who acquired their disability during childhood or by middle age. Persons aging with a physical disability confront threats to their functional abilities on four broad levels: (1) progression of their underlying disability; (2) development of secondary conditions (i.e., other conditions related to or as complications of their disabling condition); (3) development of comorbid chronic conditions associated with aging (i.e., conditions not related in etiology to the underlying disability); and changes in social, socioeconomic, and physical environments (e.g., widowhood, retirement from work, fixed income, downsizing home, becoming unable to drive). This talk will explore each of these four dimensions, looking first at the nature and epidemiology of the concerns and then drawing upon stories from research interviews and the literature to highlight the personal dimensions of aging with a physical disability.

Keywords

aging, disability, personal beliefs, functional limitations

Presentation available from the [FICCDAT Growing Older conference site](#)