

A TOOL FOR HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE THIRD AGE: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

UMA FERRAMENTA PARA A PROMOÇÃO DA SAÚDE NA TERCEIRA IDADE: A TECNOLOGIA DE INFORMAÇÃO E COMUNICAÇÃO

UNA HERRAMIENTA PARA LA PROMOCIÓN DE LA SALUD EN LA TERCERA EDAD: TECNOLOGÍA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN E INFORMACIÓN

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The population aging affects the whole society, an issue that is extrapolated at global level. Currently, in our western culture, this situation is common, but, in recent history, this issue was unthinkable, since only few people reached adulthood in the population⁽¹⁾.

At global level, approximately in the year 2050, there will be three times more people aged over 65 years, reflecting in an approximate number of 1.5 billion⁽¹⁾.

Therefore, the interest in the theme results from the need to analyze the leisure activities in the elderly population in relation to the management of new information technologies (IT) and their influence on health. Thus, this review will contribute to the knowledge on the influence of IT on the old age phase in relation to the increased daily social activities, and consequently, their health.

The people who currently make up the social stratum of the third age come from a recent time without technological innovations, such as mobile telephony, internet and even text messages in the phone application, currently widely extended at social level. When our elderly people grew and developed, there were no electronic agendas, computers or mobile phones. Their world was constituted by the relationships established with people in their immediate environment, which provided solutions to problems and everyday activities⁽²⁾. Those people who are currently in the third age lived situations when they commonly went to the house of the only neighbor with telephone and radio at home to receive an urgent call, to call to the health service of the area or even listen to the radio⁽¹⁾.

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We are currently immersed in the digital era, in which the use of internet and mobile phone is part of life, and even essential in order to maintain and enhance the social relations without forgetting the benefits at cognitive and psychological level that produce its good use in the collective of the elderly, avoiding social isolation⁽³⁾.

Focusing on Spain, the increase in this population group is mainly due to the decreased mortality and increased life expectancy, without forgetting the falling birth rate and the migratory phenomena. Therefore, one can speak of a spectacular growth in the number of people aged over 65 years and, therefore, an increased need for health resources for chronic diseases, an issue that requires personnel specialized in geriatrics⁽⁴⁾.

Those professionals must incorporate new technologies as a health resource in order to meet this increasing sector of society, using them for health promotion programs and increasing their quality of life. Those changes have social, health and cultural impact, as well as in the quality of life of people aged over 65 years⁽⁴⁾.

The fact that this age group can participate in social and cultural activities allows them keep their mental and social continuity after reaching the end of the work stage. As a result, those people remain active after their retirement and improve their health, especially at psychological level. Currently, the digital media, most commonly used by young populations, have been increasingly used in the aging population, an issue that involves an improvement in self-esteem and even greater sense of self-accomplishment⁽⁵⁾. Therefore, this tool provides a social-health coverage, a continuity of the social role after the retirement and, consequently, a greater sense of happiness⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾.

Given the scientific evidence on the improvement of health in this population group by the use of new technologies, their study by health professionals is essential. For this reason, in Nursing Graduation, and applying the cross-sectional competences of the Bologna Plan, the management of IT tools is learned. After this, the future nurses will be able to make a work of education and health promotion within primary health care on the use of new technologies to the elderly, with special emphasis on health-related applications. These can be a support where this population group record vital information for the follow-up of chronic diseases, such as blood glucose levels, blood pressure, physical activity. This makes new technologies not only a social support for the elderly, but also a resource that can improve their health⁽⁶⁾.

Education to people aged over 65 years relating to new technologies (IT) could improve their quality of life, in areas such as social relations, communications, improved memory and learning ability. As a result, not only would life expectancy increase, but also its quality. Both public and private institutions should enhance the learning of the use of new technologies to this population group. Regarding the social role of the elderly, we can define two support groups: the primary (family, friends, neighbors, among others) and secondary (related to new technologies). Therefore, the use of social networks combined with aging can reduce the feeling of loneliness, since it is a support network for this age group⁽¹⁾.

It is of vital importance to enhance the active aging, which the World Health Organization (WHO) defined as “the process to maximize opportunities for physical, mental and social well-being throughout life”⁽⁷⁾. Thus, social-health policies should be developed to promote an active aging, by ministries with competence in health and from international organizations, and even by the civil society. The aim is to improve the health, participation and use of new active methodologies included within IT with the elderly⁽²⁾.

In summary, the use of new technologies results from primary education, even at the university level. Therefore, more and more young people use them as leisure and work tool⁽⁸⁾. On the other hand, the elderly population mostly use them to keep family relationships and with their peers.

Mobile phones have features and functions, which have generated higher access to electronic books, emails, short messages and even on-line games. Some of the reasons explored for the use of mobile

telephony has associated with the entertainment and stress relief, and even new abilities, as they promote creativity and self-expression, thus becoming a daily practice for the purposes of social interaction and relaxation⁽⁷⁾.

In turn, in the face of stressful life events, the use of the technologies helps manage mood, even being recognized by peers and enhancing social relations⁽³⁾. Furthermore, the elderly consumers of both internet and mobile telephony have faced a lower incidence of problems at mental level, and increased participation rates and social integration with their peers.

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