A New Decade of Real Health

Today, science and technology have merged to find ways for aging Americans to achieve long-lasting physical and mental health.

February 22, 2020 By Kate Ferguson

When I initially applied for the Gerontological Society of America's 2019 Journalists in Aging Fellowship, my primary motivation was the chance to learn more about current research and issues being studied in a field that's bursting with potential for doing so much good for so many in the communities where we live, and others beyond.

As a fellow, I attended the organization's annual scientific meeting held in Austin, Texas and immersed myself in a daily round of programs, panels and presentations about research findings, trends and new developments in the field. These areas focused on high-tech innovations, pharmaceutical interventions, drugs in the pipeline and interventions to help Americans age successfully and healthily while staying nimble—physically and mentally—and self-sufficient into their later years.

According to the Census Bureau, within the next 20 years older adults are projected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history. This is because people have been having fewer babies and living longer. One of the big problems, however, is that aging is a risk factor for many chronic conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, heart and kidney disease, Alzheimer's and other dementias, among many other illnesses that disproportionately affect African Americans.

Interestingly, by 2030 all baby boomers will be age 65 or older. Black people in this population group will be particularly affected by social determinants of health, such as food assistance, affordable housing, transportation, income, educational status and access to quality medical care.

These issues—all drivers of health disparities—along with other factors, such as racism and its effects on physical and mental health, affect health outcomes for African Americans of all ages, gender and economic status, which is why they will be explored in the pages of Real Health.

As a new decade begins the focus of the publication is squarely on age-related illnesses and conditions and investigations on emerging treatments and pharmaceutical drugs being studied that promise to modify or eliminate the aging process. Longevity and regenerative medicine are the next frontiers to be explored in science and health. The goal of Real Health is to make readers aware of the latest findings in these areas of study and trends in aging research that specifically affects individuals living in our communities.

In addition, we're currently at the intersection of technology and lifestyle with the development of new methods, measures and mechanisms that are being used to benefit our health in many different ways. Artificial intelligence has fueled the creation of high-tech gadgets, cutting-edge wearables and other smart devices that have changed how we live, work, play and care for our minds and bodies.

As we age, these innovations will undoubtedly help to make longevity a more attainable goal for many people. But for African Americans, technology-based solutions to health problems that plague the Black community are necessary tools needed to address challenges that face the aging population, such as an increase in chronic illnesses and high health care costs. These obstacles to people achieving health equity must be overcome for individuals to benefit from the digital revolution that's sweeping the nation.

According to a report two years ago, the global digital health market was expected to increase fourfold by 2020, led by mobile health and telehealth. "Communities that historically have been underserved in health care stand to benefit from digital health," wrote Rosalind McLymont in her article titled "Digital Health: Revolutionizing Delivery Quality for African-Americans."

But a huge part of the discussion in Real Health will continue to focus on actions that can't be overstated or underestimated and which remain under our control: modifying our behaviors to include eating healthier and smarter and engaging in the appropriate amount of activity experts recommend to maximize our physical and mental health and well-being.

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