

# Attitudes Matter

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# We grow old in context...

- In our families
- In our communities
- In our organizations
- In our society



# “A devastating undercurrent of ageism”

(Loucks Campbell 2009. Kitchener Waterloo Record.)

- Ageism is based in our beliefs that are deeply held society
  - In families
    - in caregiving relationships, proxy decision making
    - Families taking unfair advantage
  - In government policies
    - advanced directives, rules of institutionalization
    - medicalization of the social problems of age
    - Loneliness or elder abuse may be defined as health problem
  - In organizations
    - How do the organizations you know treat older persons?
  - In the workplace
    - Stereotypical beliefs re competence of older workers
    - They will not come to work, will not keep up with new methods



# Ageism – One of the last “isms”

- This “ism” has the tacit approval of our society
  - Jokes
  - “senior moment”.
  - I must have Alzheimer’s...
  - “I can’t remember. I must be getting old.”
  - “Bed blockers”
  - Calling an older adult “hon”
- In Families
  - I hear “I had to put Mother in a home” seemingly without conversation,
  - Evidence they know they have the power
- The grocery line

**Power and ageism are inseparably linked**



# Ageism – Organizations and Policies

## Health care

- inadequate long term care
  - Poor pay, not enough professional development opportunities
  - Support for dependence rather than independence sometimes
  - Waitlist ultimatum ... “if you do not take this bed you will be off the list”
  - Yes, we blame staff who are also suffering in a difficult situation while doing their best
- Home care
  - not enough money, not enough support
  - staff running from one home to the next, poor pay, little respect
  - Hugman wrote that as the clients of the professional have little respect so do the professionals



# Impact of Power

- Restrict individual rights
- Policing mentality to control abuse in institutions
- Old Person as Citizen (Gilleard, C. & Higgs, P. (2000). Cultures of ageing. Prentice Hall.)
  - “Senior citizen” – a constructed mark of old age
  - Universal social security and typical retirement age together both protect older people and keep them poor simultaneously.
- Elder abuse (trust, power, protection)
- Rising health care costs blamed on elderly
  - In an atmosphere where assisted suicide is supported by many
  - What about offering better care?



# Other evidence

- In my research

No one in a long term care home in the study believed they had decision making power

Glass of juice

“Oh yes, we do have one decision to make”

“I signed the paper but there was some pushing going on”



# What can we do?

- Broaden Our Perspective
- Look beyond the narrow focus on the individual and on the narrow definition of health
- Remember the power you hold and use it
- Remember all of us have rights enshrined in Canadian law whether we are old or caregivers or family members
  - Freedom of expression
  - Right to equality, including equality of men and women
  - The right to life, liberty and personal security and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice
  - Right to not be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned
  - Right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment

Source: Charter of Rights and Freedom (Canada 2002)



# Keep it personal

- Identify our own ageist attitudes
- Watch for, identify ageism when it surfaces
- Ask yourself “how would I feel if this were a younger person?”
- Stop hiding your age. Show it off.
- Look for the strengths of older clients. Don’t be part of the problem.
- What did you know 10 years ago? Now?
- Experts in living. Younger people need to recognize what we are missing. We are wasting one of our most precious resources – our wise elders – older Canadians need our help.



# We CAN change this world...

- We know about resources like the World Health Organization, about the innate strengths people hold, about skills of communication, about the social determinants of health
- We know about the value of our old people



# Thank You

