Aging with and into Physical Disabilities

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We’re all getting older…

- Currently 12.4% of US Population are >65 (37.3 million)
- By 2030, expected to be 20.4% (71.5 million)
"True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country."

~Kurt Vonnegut
The stereotypes of aging
Older adults are only the “same” in that they’re so “different”

- Older adults show more intergroup variability than do younger adults in almost all areas
  - physical functioning and capability
  - cognitive abilities
    - Crystallized intelligence
    - Complex reasoning and problem-solving
  - emotional functioning
    - Depression, anxiety, happiness
Employment is one area of variability

- In 1995, 30% of those over 55 had some gainful employment
- In 2016, the number was closer to 40%
- Most of this increase has been in the last 10 years
- Unemployment rate for people over 55 is 3.8% (in 2/16), lower than national rate (4.9%)
The projections look at growth in the number of older workers.
Older workers now outnumber teens in the workforce

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, via Haver Analytics

Northwest ADA Center
University of Washington
More older workers are full time employees

![Graph showing the percent of workers 65 and over by work schedule from 1977 to 2007. The graph indicates an increase in full-time employment among older workers, with a significant rise post-2001.](#)
Ageism is alive and well in the workplace

- In the US, age discrimination claims have gone from 15,785 in 1997 to 21,396 in 2013.
- Those age 55 and up spend 10 to 11 months looking for new work after leaving a job, compared with about four to seven months for workers age 16 to 34.
- Increasing age is associated with:
  - More frequent firing
  - Lack of hiring
  - Perceived lack of support of supervisors
- Identified stereotypes among employers:
  - Older workers are “incompetent”, “behind” and “disengaged”
- Fears among older workers:
  - Tech is too advanced
- Perceived ageism in the workplace is associated with:
  - Poorer job satisfaction, commitment and engagement
Some “helpful” tips

Getting the Job You Want After 50 for Dummies

Learn to:
- Showcase the value you have to offer a potential employer
- Perfect your résumé and interview skills
- Negotiate for what you want
- Snag your dream job in the age of social media
- Launch a whole new career or business

Kerry Hannon
• “Set up a gmail account – it looks more current than Hotmail or AOL”
• “People judge a book by its cover – you need to present a youthful and energetic appearance”
  o Hannon (“Getting the Job you Want After 50 For Dummies”)
• “Take a good enough job – one that pays less or is in another field.”
• “If you don’t get a new job right away, you have a short window... before becoming long-term unemployed.”
  o Chideya (“The Episodic Career: How to Thrive at Work in the Age of Disruption”)
Aging “into” and aging “with” physical disabilities
Aging “into” disability

- All these new older adults mean a greater incidence of new-onset disabling conditions
  - Osteoarthritis, MI, stroke, falls, amputation
- Over age 65, 2/3rds suffer from multiple chronic conditions contributing to disability
- These individuals utilize 65% of the US healthcare budget
Aging “with” disability

- In 2010, 29.5 million Americans aged 21-64 (16.6% of the working age population) reported physical disabilities
- 260,000 individuals with SCI
- 350,000 individuals with MS
- 50,000 individuals with muscular dystrophy
- 177,000 individuals with post-polio syndrome
- Each year, 1.7 million TBI’s
Aging with disability.

• Those with disability are living longer...
• Example: SCI
  o In 1940, average life expectancy post-SCI was 18 months
  o In 2005, average life expectancy with SCI is approximately 85% of normal (~68 years)
  o This means that in the past 50 years
    • survival for persons with SCI has increased 2000% percent
    • survival for the nondisabled population has increased only 30%
Aging with disability

- **Spinal Cord Injury**
  - Average age now ~40 years
  - 40% are over age 45
  - Average age at onset increased from 28.7 to 38.0 from 1973

- **Multiple Sclerosis**
  - Mean age 49-53 years
  - 42% over the age of 65

- **Post-polio syndrome**
  - 90% are over the age of 55

- **Cerebral Palsy**
  - Death in childhood is now rare (about 2%)
  - 86% of those who survive childhood will live past age 50
Many diagnoses

Aging “into” disabilities
- Osteoarthritis
- COPD
- Vascular dementia
- Coronary artery disease
- Osteoporosis
- Diabetes (complications)
  - limb loss
  - peripheral neuropathies

Aging “with” disabilities
- Spinal cord injury
- Traumatic brain injury
- Neuromuscular disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Developmental disabilities
- Post-polio syndrome
Shared needs

- Employment Support
- Risk of falls
- Chronic pain
- Risk for infections
- Risk for fractures
- Need for caregiver support
- Cognitive impairment
- Depression/withdrawal
- Changes in vision/hearing
- Mobility limitations
Different philosophies

“for the disabilities system, aging is a success; for the aging network, disability is a failure.”

-Ansello, 2004
There is an increased awareness of mutual opportunity

- 2009 federal expansion of the Aging and Disability Resource Center model
- Inclusion of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research and the Administration on Aging into the ACL
- Increasing pressure for community agencies to serve both older adults and those with disabilities
Employment Consequences of Disability

- 78% of people with disabilities are not in the workforce
- Higher for people of color and certain disabilities
- Most people with disabilities would prefer to work
- Most people with disabilities can work
Rates of employment

- In persons with MD, 32-40% maintain employment.
- In a UWMC survey, 18% of people aging with PPS were employed.
- 30% in MS.
- For people with SCI, about 60% were employed premorbidly and in general, only about 30% are employed 5 years later. For people who were injured at a younger age, employment rates increase as they get older. For people injured after the age of 55, rates go down.
Barriers to employment for people aging with a disability in the US

- Irrational subsidy system
- Necessity of close access to rehab care
- Functional limitations associated with the primary disability
- Social and environmental access issues
- Lack of vocational rehabilitation and related services
As individuals with disabilities age, the barriers to participation change
There is a trade-off to living longer…

Secondary Conditions

• Osteoarthritis
• Psychological comorbidities
• Chronic Pain
• Fatigue
• Pressure ulcers
• UTI
• Balance problems
• Vision changes
• Hearing changes

“Accelerated Aging”

• More rapid development of
  o CHD
  o Diabetes
  o Dementia (in DD)
  o Osteoarthritis
  o Immunosenescence
Chronic Pain In Acquired Disability: Point Prevalence

- multiple sclerosis
- stroke
- NMD
- brain injury
- amputation
- spinal cord injury

percent
When in life are secondary conditions most impactful for people with long-term physical disabilities?

Middle age – rubber meets road
• In nondisabled people, 45-64 is a stressful time
  o Peak financial burden, parenting demands, pre-retirement planning, more “daily hassles”

• In people with disability, there is all of this plus worsening secondary health conditions, declining health, earlier involuntary retirement
In persons with disability, middle-age is associated with

- Highest rates of depression
- Highest rates of falls and fall-related injuries
- Highest rates of pain and pain interference
- Highest levels of fatigue
Pain Interference by age, disability and US general population samples.
So where’s the “retirement bonus?”

- This age group may be associated with
  - Highest levels of expectations for performance
  - Onset of new secondary health conditions
  - For some disabilities, ongoing degeneration
  - Involuntary decreases in work, associated with financial pressures
  - Increases in negative affect associated with activity restriction
Understanding the older adult who is aging *with* disability requires an understanding of the broader psychosocial context in which disability occurs.
Age-related factors to consider in aging with disability

• Age at injury or onset
• Current age
• Years with disability
• Age “cohort”
  o An individual’s feelings about what it is to be a disabled person, based on their social context
  o The available medical treatments available at the time of injury
• Social/political influences around disability
Social support in older adults

- Older adults have smaller, more selective social networks than do younger adults.
- This probably involves intentional selection of closer partners (i.e., “social trimming”).
- Older women tend to receive support from larger and more empathetic sources than do older men.
- Bereavement is a real issue: over the age of 65, 51% of women and 13.6% of men have lost a spouse.
Social support and disability

- Individuals aging with disability have unique social support needs.
- At least in SCI, most individuals rely on their spouses to fulfill the majority of these needs.
  - (41% of men with SCI report that their wife is their “only” source of support.)
- Individuals with disabilities are less likely to marry, and have higher than average divorce rates (21%).
- Individuals aging with disability report that their caretakers are also aging.
What do we need?

- Greater awareness of the scope and nature of the “aging with disability” problem
- Improved access to rehabilitative care (especially for those in the middle-age “doughnut hole”)
- Workplace accommodations to manage secondary health conditions, not just to improve access/function
Questions and Discussion?