



‘Age Wave’ – Science of Ageing A Demographic Imperative for Healthcare

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Driven by the convergence of three powerful demographic and psychographic trends, the way we think about ageing, disease, and the potential of healthcare is beginning to change radically. The predictable nature of these trends, if we understand them, can more readily allow us to help the coming age wave to successfully increase their health expectancy as they increase their life expectancy.

The first trend is the ever-compounding *longevity revolution*, the result of dramatic advances in medicine and biotechnology. We are the first humans to experience long life *en masse*. Aided by technological breakthroughs in the life sciences, medicine, and health care, people are living longer than ever before. Throughout 99 per cent of human history, average life expectancy was less than 18 years. In the twentieth century alone, average life expectancy increased by 29 years. According to even the most conservative estimates, average life expectancy will continue to rise over the next several decades. Demographer James Vaupel describes the future of longevity as "a new paradigm of ageing in which average life expectancy worldwide could reach one hundred or more."¹ It is projected that the number of centenarians worldwide will increase sixteen fold by the year 2050.²

The second trend is the steady *decline of the youth-focused society*. Just 100 years ago, the median age was 17 years. We were a *youth-focused society* for all the right reasons. The major concern for healthcare was acute, infectious disease. However, according to the United Nations, both birth rates and mortality rates are now declining, radically changing the age structure of most countries worldwide.³ Globally, more than half of all people who have ever turned 65 years of age are alive today, and those who reach 65 years of age can expect to live another 17 years.⁴ Italy is the first country to have more people over age 65 than under age 25, followed by Germany, Greece, and Spain.⁵ Not only is the number of older adults growing, but that same population is accumulating an enormous economic base. In the twenty-first century, the group with the greatest control and influence will no longer be the young but the old with a growing concern for chronic, degenerative disease and how to prevent, delay, and manage those diseases effectively.

The last trend is the impact of the *pioneering values, attitudes, and traits of the boomers*. This generation has already transformed every stage of life through which they have passed while continually influencing younger generations. Between 1946 and 1964, 76 million boomers were born in the United States alone. That translates into one third of the entire U.S. population born during an 18-year period. Similar population explosions took place throughout Australia, Canada, Great Britain, France, New Zealand, and other westernized nations. Boomers are the first generation of highly educated, rebellious, controlling individuals who do not embrace the same values and traits as their parents and grandparents. They do not accept ageing gracefully and promise to revolutionize maturity, creating future generations of *empowered patients* who will demand effective tools to help them live longer and better.

With life expectancy increasing, older adults dominating our society, and empowered ageing patients unlike ever before, there comes a welcome interest in *prolonging health expectancy*. Although the ageing population is a tribute to the successes of modern healthcare, it also reveals the weaknesses and limits of our current approach to medicine and healthcare. The healthcare system has focused largely on extending life, but not on creating healthy and vital, older adults. This problem is particularly prevalent among the very old. We have produced legions of long-lived elders who struggle with the very problems that the worldwide healthcare system is ill-prepared to handle, such as preventing, delaying, and successfully managing arthritis, heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, and Alzheimer's disease.

As we see large segments of the population living longer, it becomes essential to the overall good of society to "compress morbidity" or to "live long, live healthy, and die fast," according to Dr. James Fries, Professor of Medicine at Stanford University Medical School. He says that "a life that is vigorous and vital until shortly before its natural close" is the ideal.⁶

As they continue to age, the boomers will crave vigor, vitality, sexual activity, and life extension. They are going to want to not only live long but age well and delay the onset of chronic degenerative disease as long as possible. They will demand products and services that help them to manage and maintain their own health, vigor and vitality. The successful healthcare companies of tomorrow will be those that develop products and services that help them to do just that so that they can "live long, live healthy, and die fast."

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