Caring for Our Earth and Ourselves
Focusing Attention on Climate Change and Older Adults

Fall is in full force as I write this editorial, and it is by far my favorite season. In my local state of Pennsylvania, my senses are filled with beautiful colors, smells, and sounds of the outdoors and calming forests. Yet, as beautiful as the forests and cities are this time of year, they are also severely threatened by our climate change crisis and world leaders’ reluctance to limit the fossil fuel industries. This is a crisis that impacts older adults’ health and well-being and requires individual, system, and policy change (Mann, 2019).

An article in this month’s issue of *Journal of Gerontological Nursing* addresses the health risks of climate change in older adults (McDermott-Levy, Kolanowski, Fick, & Mann, 2019). This article brings together nurses and one of the world’s best known scientists on climate change: Dr. Michael Mann, Distinguished Professor of Atmospheric Science and Director of the Earth System Science Center from Penn State; Dr. Ruth McDermott-Levy, Nurse Climate Scientist and Director of the Center of Global and Public Health from Villanova University; Dr. Ann Kolanowski, Professor, Gerontologist, and Clinician Scientist from Penn State; and myself, Dr. Donna Fick, Director of the Center for Geriatric Excellence at Penn State, who has a passion for improving care in older adults and saving the earth! This article introduces the topic of climate change to nurses in a way that is understandable and addresses what makes older adults more vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather events (that are caused by climate change). For instance, “The geographic distribution of older adults in the United States is such that more than one half live in areas that disproportionately experience the effects of heat waves, forest fires, hurricanes, and coastal flooding” (McDermott-Levy et al., 2019, p. 23). Extreme weather caused by climate change is an even bigger issue for older adults globally, especially those in underdeveloped countries. Aging changes, comorbidities, medications, and social isolation also make older adults and persons with disabilities more vulnerable to climate change. The article gives an overview on the science and mechanisms of climate change so that practicing nurses can advocate for older adults, help mitigate climate change, and assess and act on these issues. Be sure to check out the two tables included in the article (McDermott-Levy et al., 2019) and use them in your work and classroom.

Several other important articles are included in this issue as well, such as the article on a survey conducted in middle-aged and older adults with...
heart failure (HF) to learn about their use of and willingness to use technology for HF education and self-management. Of all participants, 70% indicated willingness to use technology (Tarte & Amirehsani, 2019). This is important work, which needs to be taken further to understand disparities in technology use, as well as barriers to and facilitators of its use in management of HF and other chronic diseases.

Another article examines the impact of board-certified RNs on national and state quality indicators (Keeler, Baier, Kosar, Culross, & Cramer, 2019). As an American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) certified gerontological clinical nurse specialist, I was very interested in the results of this small convenience sample survey and I hope you are, too. These and future studies are critical as we make the case for or against specialized training and certification to improve nursing home or hospital quality, satisfaction, and overall resident care.

In closing, I wish you a happy fall and Thanksgiving. Please share this month’s issue with your friends and students and remember, as you enjoy the fall leaves (or sunny beach or gentle snow), climate change is a health and nursing issue and gerontological nurses can make a difference!

REFERENCES


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