

## **Editorial comment**

### **Ageing and Disability**

The world's population is ageing and the low and middle income countries are not left out of this graying epidemic. The World Health Organization estimates that the world's population of persons aged 60 years and above will nearly double; with the proportion increasing from 12% to 22% between 2015 and 2050 [1]. The latest Global Burden of Disease 2015 analysis showed that life expectancy from birth has increased by more than one decade in many countries [2]. The gains were attributed to decreases in deaths from HIV/AIDS, malaria, neonatal preterm birth complications, and maternal disorders particularly in sub-Saharan Africa [2]. The longevity trend is a welcome development and indeed a good thing because nations can benefit from the wealth of experience of the older individuals, who can serve as custodians of tradition and culture as well as repositories of knowledge, provided they are cognitively intact. What matters therefore in old age is good quality of life.

Old age is characterized by infirmities and frailty. These are consequent upon immune senescence, accumulation of “wear and tear” or past insults to the body, sensory impairment and degeneration involving many organs. A German proverb likened old age to a hospital that takes in all diseases. Disability is assessed in terms of years lived with disability (YLD) and years of life lost (YLL) from which Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY) is calculated. This has been the standard measure for the GBD studies and for international comparison.

This issue of the journal features a review paper on the assessment of disability in older adults living in low and middle income countries and highlights the importance of chronic diseases. The paucity of published data on the measurement of disability in older persons in sub-Saharan Africa was evident from this publication by Dr. Ojagbemi. The seven papers used for the systematic review were derived from studies in South and Central America and South East Asia. The review showed that sensory impairment in old age (visual and hearing) and dementia were the highest ranking diseases associated with disability in this old spectrum. However, since the geographic coverage is limited, more studies are needed in other low and middle income countries to add to the list of disability-causing chronic diseases. The publication is considered timely and a shot in the arm for researchers in SSA to focus on causes and impact of disability in older persons so that appropriate health policy changes can follow.

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