



LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT AGING AND SEXUALITY

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OBJECTIVES

- Gain awareness of the importance of having conversations with clients, patients, residents and/or family members about aging and sexuality;
- Understanding of the possible implications (physical, social and mental health) for older adults, the community, and health care systems if we don't have this discussion;
- Learn about potential venues for sex education and discussions about safe sex;
- Learn how to be supportive of older adults engaged in consensual intimate relationships.

OVERVIEW

- Why are so many people uncomfortable talking about sex with older adults?
- What are the possible implications for older adults themselves (physical, social and mental health), community, and health care systems if we don't have this discussion?

OVERVIEW CONTINUED

- There are a multitude of venues for adolescents and young adults to get information about sex, but not older adults.
- Do people stop having sex, are they no longer interested in sex, can they “sex” and does sex and intimacy mean the same to all people regardless of age?
- These are some of the topics we will review today.

OVERVIEW CONTINUED

- First let's operationalize the term sex. When we talk about sex we are not only referring to intercourse between heterosexual couples but to all levels of intimate expression for Heterosexual, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender people.
- It is the act of intimacy with others and/or oneself. That is the focus of our topic. When we limit the conversation to only intercourse too many people are left out.

WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT SEX AND AGING?



WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW CONTINUED

- That the need/desire for intimate contact continues throughout the lifespan;
- That by not asking post menopausal women if they are sexually active may impact their psychological and physical health and well being;
- That people 50+ (primarily women) are the fastest rising group with HIV;
- That asking men if they are sexually active might assist in screening for prostate cancer and overall prostate health.

WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW CONTINUED

- That older adults are “capable” of expressing themselves intimately;
- That certain illnesses and/or medications can impact desire and expression;
- That consensual expression is appropriate.



ARE YOU AFRAID TO DISCUSS SEX WITH OLDER ADULTS?

- You are not alone if you'd admit to feeling uncomfortable talking with older adults about their sexual needs and/or expressions.



DO YOU FEAR THAT ASKING ABOUT SEXUALITY WILL BE AN INVASION OF PRIVACY?

- Respect for Privacy is the not the same as ignoring people's needs.
- Older adults need to be able to talk about their sexual concerns and receive information pertinent to their needs.
- Older adults need the opportunity to express themselves sexually and satisfy their sexual desires.



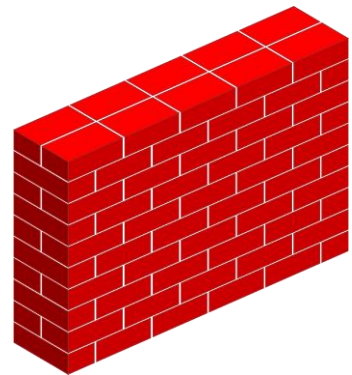
SOCIAL ISSUES THAT MAY HAVE BEEN FACED BY TODAY'S OLDER ADULTS...

- Adults ages 70-80 today were teens in the 1940's and 1950's, a time of mixed signals about sex and love.
- Adults ages 50-60 today were teens and young adults during the 1960's and 1970's, when there was a multifaceted "sexual revolution".



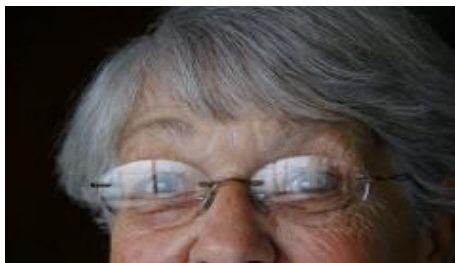
MYTHS AND BARRIERS ABOUT SEX FOR OLDER ADULTS...

- They do not want to be sexually active
- Sexual interests decrease with age
- They are not capable of or desirous of having sex
- There is no risk of STD's/ HIV/AIDS



WHAT DOES IT MEAN NOT TO ASK?

- Physicians and Professionals are not immune to the ageist stereotypes of our society, and this can be a problem both in prevention and diagnosis of HIV/AIDS among older adults.
- The physician who does not see past the gray hair may not ask older people about their sexual activity or drug use, and may not give the prevention information that is routine with younger patients.



BUT WHAT ELSE.....

- Is a patient not taking medications because of the sexual side effects?
- Are they using protection to prevent STD's – Sexual Transmitted Diseases?
- Do they know the changes in their bodies and health and what they can do to reach sexual pleasure and the intimacy they desire?



ISSUES THAT SOME OLDER ADULTS MIGHT FACE WITH SEXUALITY?



COMMON BARRIERS THAT MAY PREVENT OLDER ADULTS FROM HAVING SEX...

- Physiological and biological changes
- Illness and/or decline in health (self or partner)
- Feelings of guilt (i.e. cultural and/or generational attitudes about sex)
- Inability to discuss issues & concerns with healthcare professionals
- Fear of what others will think or say
- Impotence
- Available partner
- Lack of privacy
- Low Self Esteem



QUESTIONS AND INFORMATION



- Ask them if they are sexually active.
- Correct any misconceptions and answer any questions they might have about their sexual activities.
- Teach older adult patients about the physical changes that may affect sexual functioning.
- Also include education about the importance of protection from STD's, including HIV/AIDS. Many older adults are unaware they may be at risk for becoming infected and use no protection when engaging in sexual activity.

SUPPORT

- Provide support for expression of older adult's sexuality and act as their advocate with other healthcare providers who may express discomfort.
- If an older adult's current beliefs interfere with contentment and sexual enjoyment, offer an alternative point of view.



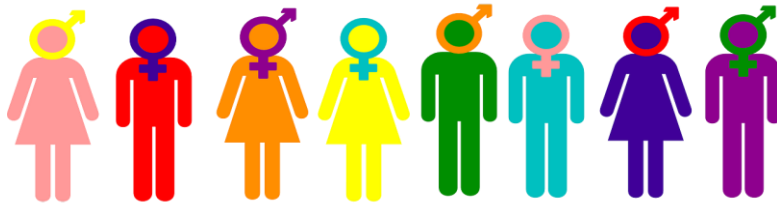
PROTECTION

- Sometimes, older adults fall prey to others who might take advantage of them. Always protect those who are unable to make their own decisions about engaging in sexual activity.
- Sexual contact and intimate expression must always be consensual.



EMPOWERMENT

- Advocate for the healthy expression of sexual behavior. Help older adults feel physically attractive, such as by providing beauty salons and cosmetic services.
- Don't assume sexual orientation. Every individual, no matter how they define their sexuality or gender, is worthy of respect.



CONFIDENTIALITY

- Encourage privacy and remove barriers to sexual expression. Allow intimate interactions (such as in nursing homes), ensure privacy, allow doors to remain shut.



THE FACTS: HIV AND THE GROWING NUMBERS

- The most recent findings discovered that 15% of new HIV diagnoses are in adults 50 and older (about 1.2 million Americans).
- Between 2001 and 2008 the number of people 50 and older diagnosed with HIV increased 77%.
- Today, 24% of all Americans living with HIV and 31% of all Americans living with AIDS are 50 years of age or older.
- In 2015 the Center for Disease Control estimates that 50% of Americans living with HIV will be 50 and older.
- 1 in 5 people with HIV are unaware of their infection.



LACK OF INFORMATION

- State of Current Information
- Do you think to ask?
 - ❖ Remembering to talk about safe sex even when pregnancy is not an issue
- Stigma of HIV/AIDS



IMPROVING RESOURCES

- Specific Strategies for Prevention Information
 - ❖ Peer to Peer Communication
 - ❖ Remembering to ASK!
 - ❖ Technology

- Considerations for all Strategies and Information
 - ❖ Appropriate content
 - ❖ Avoid the “ostrich”
 - ❖ Start with a baseline
 - ❖ The Audience



DISCUSSION

- <http://www.grayingofaids.org/sue-video-portrait/>
- Would you be able to have this conversation with your clients, patients, residents, parents or grandparents?

CONCLUSION

- Throughout this presentation and the discussion, we hope we have provided you and your loved ones, patients and/or clients with some information to consider;
- Leave assumptions and preconceived ideas about aging and sexuality at the “door”;
- That sexuality and intimacy can be an essential component of a healthy and meaningful life;
- That if health care and service providers don’t ask, listen and educate, who will?

CONCLUSION CONTINUED

- It is important as health care providers, service providers, researchers and educators to keep informed;
- Expand the meaning of sexuality and intimacy that encompasses how all elders may express themselves – sex is not just intercourse;
- That ill health does not have to be a barrier to intimate expression;
- That talking about safe sex is not just for “kids”.



THANK YOU!

Talking about sex can add quality to someone's life.

So Let's Talk About Sex

Thank you for your participation!

RESOURCES

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RESOURCES CONTINUED

- Costelloe-Kuehn, A. (n.d.). Safe Sex for Seniors: 7 Essential Tips Nobody's Giving You. Retrieved from <http://seniorplanet.org/safe-sex-for-seniors-the-facts-no-ones-giving-you/>
- Sexuality in Later Life. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/sexuality-later-life>
- **[Sexuality in older age: essential considerations for healthcare ...](#)**
- ageing.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/07/19/ageing.afr049.full

Resources on Sex Education for Older Adults

- <http://seniorplanet.org/safe-sex-for-seniors-the-facts-no-ones-giving-you/>
- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/sexuality-later-life>