Article Type: Bookshelf

Health System Responses to Population Ageing and Noncommunicable Diseases in Asia. V.

Yiengprugsawan, J. Healy, & H. Kendig, (Eds). World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia, New Delhi, India, 2016. ISBN: 9978 92 9022 517 1.

<http://www.who.int/iris/handle/10665/252738>

If you are interested in population ageing in Sri Lanka and Thailand, this free eBook produced by the World Health Organisation is worth downloading. Opening with an overview of ageing in the Asia Pacific region, the book provides two case studies, which explore in depth the impacts of population ageing, first in Sri Lanka and then Thailand.

The book is easy to read and would be of interest to undergraduate and postgraduate students studying health and human service systems and how they respond to ageing. Chapter one provides a succinct overview of the report and how it is laid out, and states that the report's foundations lie in the landmark *World report on ageing and health (2015)*, which highlighted the importance of the development of prevention and care strategies across the life course. Alongside this, the authors note that "a high proportion of total deaths across the Asia Pacific region are caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs) . . . which are predicted to increase dramatically over the next few decades" (p. 4).

This report focuses on the South-East Asia region, and compares this to the Western Pacific Region, which includes several high-income countries (Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Singapore). In South-East Asia, life expectancy for women is significantly lower (70 years versus 78 years), as is the percentage of GDP spent on health (3.7% versus 6.6%). At the systems level, the report notes that, to address these differences, the health system must focus on: primary care and early intervention; and creation of health-friendly services and integrated health services, ensuring equity of access, and with a focus on quality improvement. The report then focuses on two conditions that can benefit from prevention and care strategies: diabetes and stroke.

Chapters three and four provide standalone accounts of the health systems in Sri Lanka (population 20.2 million) and Thailand (population 65.9 million), with a key focus on strategies to improve responses to diabetes and stroke. Maternal and child health services have been the focus of service

This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the [Version of Record](#). Please cite this article as [doi: 10.1111/ajag.12518](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajag.12518)

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provision by the government in Sri Lanka over the past two decades and this “has served the country well” (p. 69), but with increasing security and positive economic growth, the health system is now focusing on the ageing population and encouraging a change in community attitudes to promote healthy and active ageing. This shift has required a change in health care workers’ knowledge, skills and attitudes, which is a current challenge to be addressed.

Thailand has an ageing population, with 30 percent of its population projected to be aged over 60 years by 2040. Like older people the world over, those in Thailand want to remain “living independently with good health and dignity” (p. 104). The Thai post-acute care and long-term care systems, however, are limited. While steps have been made to build a community-based system, this is still a work in progress, and the delivery of “effective and efficient services for the ageing population remains a current and future challenge” (p. 104).

In the final chapter, the authors reflect on the two case studies, their focus on diabetes and stroke, and the urgent need to address NCDs, because of their impact on “morbidity, disability and dependency among older people” (p. 122). Solutions are recommended, including training for health professionals in the care of older people, improving the responsiveness of services to the older person, designing age-friendly environments, integrating primary, secondary and tertiary health services, and effectively linking health and human services.

This report is well written—engaging and well researched—and alerts the reader to issues that are unique to South-East Asia. It also highlights many of the common issues that we face across the Asia-Pacific region. The report’s recommendations have relevance across the world and can play a part in how “we can transform the way policy-makers and service-providers perceive population ageing – and plan to make the most of it” (p. viii).

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Health system responses to population ageing and noncommunicable diseases in Asia

Date:

2018-03-01

Citation:

Hampson, R. (2018). Health system responses to population ageing and noncommunicable diseases in Asia. AUSTRALASIAN JOURNAL ON AGEING, 37 (1), pp.77-77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajag.12518>.

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