

Managing your age

An alternative medical approach called age management is already in place in Singapore and is very different from conventional medicine. It assesses a patient holistically and can help to reverse existing medical conditions. It can also preemptively identify potential conditions and prevent them from occurring. This is good news for seniors and for those coming up in years.



PRIME speaks to Dr Julinda Lee (left), an obstetrician and gynaecologist, and an expert of age management at Pacific Healthcare Specialist Centre, to get to the crux of what age management is all about:

What is age management?

Age management medicine is a preventive medicine focused on helping patients regain and maintain optimal health and vigour. Quality of life and improvement of health span (which is the period of life spent without disease or disability), and possibly increasing longevity are the main aims of age management medicine. Well-known and accepted markers of disease are incorporated and converted into proactive patient management.

Can you share a recent patient story and how you managed to handle him/her through age management?

Mr A is a typical male patient that I would see in my clinic. He is 50 years of age, very successful in his career and also of course leading a very demanding and stressful lifestyle. His main complaint was that he was feeling very tired all the time, and it was becoming harder and harder to keep up with what was required of him in his job. He also had problems with his weight, and his relationship with his wife was suffering as he no longer had any interest in sex.

Assessment of Mr A revealed that he had an unhealthy diet, and he did not have any time for exercise. He was also overweight with mild high blood pressure. Biochemical assessment showed that he had high cholesterol levels and slightly impaired glucose control. He also had markers to suggest that he was at high risk of heart disease and stroke.

Ageing can bring about a lot of medical conditions and most are preventable. That's when a medical approach can come into play **BY ELEANOR YAP**



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— Dr Julinda Lee

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He had a low testosterone level and a low growth hormone level as well.

He was placed on an exercise programme and dietary changes were made. He was started on therapy to improve his testosterone levels and also some supplements. Over about three months, he had managed to lose about 10 kg, with an improvement of body composition with more lean mass and lower percentage body fat. He was a lot more energetic with the improved hormone levels and was able to carry out his job in addition to establishing a daily exercise routine. His exercise tolerance was also better than before.

With the improvement in his weight and body composition, his sugar control also returned to normal and his cholesterol level had also improved. His growth hormone levels have improved with the improvement in lifestyle and the improvement of his testosterone levels. Of course his relationship with his wife had also got better.

Does age management have elements of alternative medicine?

Alternative medicine is to me methods of treatment that may not have been proven in a conventional medical setting. This does not mean that they do not work. Dietary change and exercise are medically proven ways of improving function, optimising health and reducing disease risk. The hormonal benefits for optimising function and reducing disease risk are also medically proven. Some methods of relaxation such as meditation may be important in some patients who have a high level of stress and this is of course considered alternative therapy.

What are the benefits to having age management from a conventional consultation?

Conventional medicine tends to target disease, for example, dealing with high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes. Treatment is also often targeted towards managing the endpoints, meaning treating the blood pressure,

controlling the sugar and lowering the cholesterol. However, many of these diseases are the endpoints of ageing and changes in the body that have accumulated due to our unhealthy diet or the lack of physical exercises, and changes in hormones as we age. Age management takes a more proactive, preventive approach to health. We are concerned with the prevention of disease and also of optimising a patient's function. Disease management is often targeted at what caused the disease in the first place rather than treating the endpoint with drugs.

Any misconceptions surrounding age management?

That there is a magic bullet that we can deliver to prevent ageing. A lot of the work that goes into age management comes from the determination and discipline of the patient. Therefore the patient has to make the decision to be committed to his/her own health and has to put in that effort.

Do you feel the practice of age management has any limitations or weaknesses?

It is an on-going process. If you stop exercising, start to eat poorly, stop hormonal support, then you will go back to where you had started. Of course you may have extended your life by a few years or had better function for a few years. It is not for lazy people.

How many patients do you have that are managed under age management and what are their age ranges?

I can't say that I can manage my patients differently, meaning have strictly gynae patients and strictly age management patients. It is after all an approach to health that I believe spans across the management of all my patients. But the patients that typically see me for age management are probably in their late 40s to late 50s, although I do have patients older than 80. The patients who are strictly for age management, number about 150.

Do you feel this approach will become more popular as our population is fast ageing? However, is it for every senior?

Yes, I believe that it should be an approach that all physicians should adopt in the management of their patients. It should be a holistic approach where physicians take every opportunity to ensure that their patients are in the pink of health and are doing what they can to prevent disease.

Anything else to add?

Education is probably the key to health. Many patients may not be clear about why they have a particular disease or why they are on a particular treatment. Providing them with appropriate information is important in helping them to help themselves. **P**

