

# OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

## APPENDIX 1

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# Introduction

## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

**Kathryn Evans** SCPHN, RGN, RM, Dip Mid.

Occupational Health & Wellbeing Nurse Manager

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# Ageing Workforce



# Ageing Workforce

- Its anticipated that by 2020 1 in 3 workers will be over 50 years of age.
- Currently more than 1 million people aged over 65 in employment.
- Way we think about work & retirement very different from our parents and grandparents.
- Many people see financial necessity of working for longer with state pension age rising.
- Life expectancy rising combined with declining fertility rate since 1965 means by middle of this century 48 million fewer 15-64 yr. old compared to 58 million more people aged 65 and over in EU. (BMA 2016)

# Ageing Workforce

- Health benefits of good work contribute to self – esteem wellbeing and cognitive benefits. (DWP 2016)
  - Evidence that any marked decrease in cognitive performance doesn't show until after 70 years of age. Before that any deterioration not likely to affect performance as other attributes i.e. experience, education, motivation, better judgement and job knowledge are likely to compensate. (UNISON 2013)
  - Nothing magically changes at 50 yrs.' of age but 3 key aspects are common.
- ✓ Enjoyable work- helps contribute to personal identity.
  - ✓ Interesting/challenging roles that stretch skills and experience.
  - ✓ Autonomy is important- control, over own tasks, order and methods. Older workers appreciate being able to influence wider organisation by making suggestions.

# Ageing Workforce

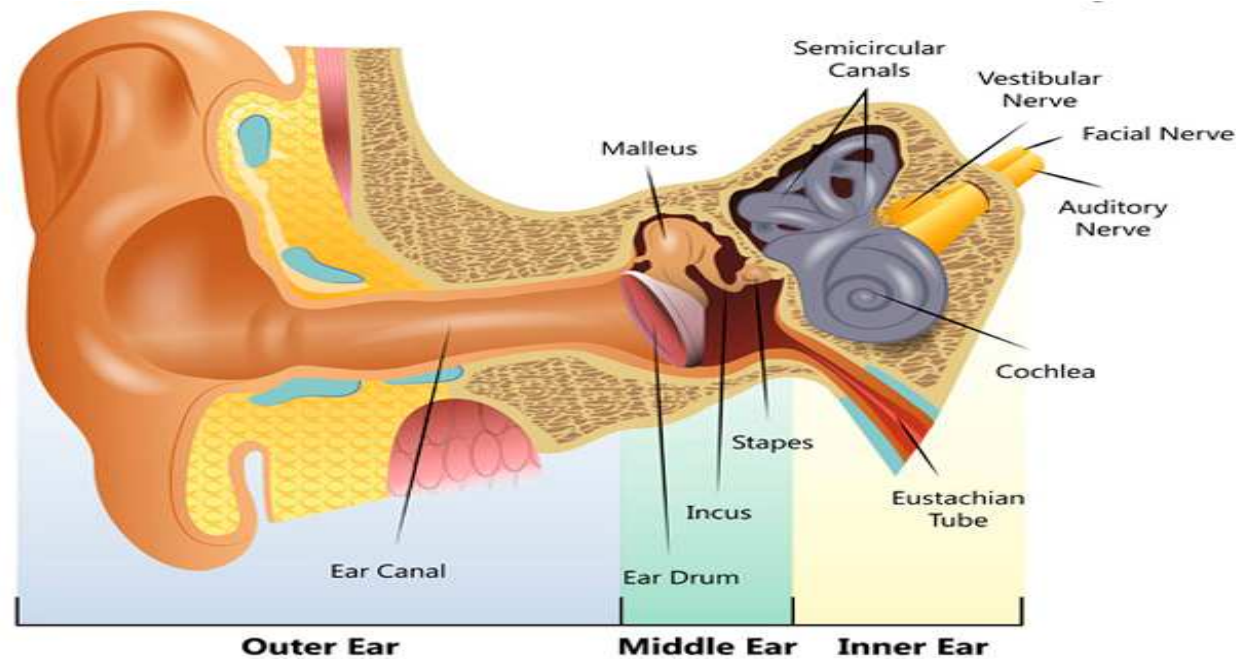
- Research by Centre for Ageing Better showed that for many older workers one of the main benefits of working in later life is opportunity to make and maintain social connections.
- Health is the main prominent factor affecting older workers decisions about continuing work. Poor health can be one of the biggest reasons older workers leave work.
- Helping older people manage and accommodate long term conditions, chronic health problems and disabilities is essential to make work viable and satisfying. A good Occupational Health provision and workplace adaptations can support older workers by making it easier to balance health conditions and work.
- It's understood that health deteriorates as we age, by taking a proactive approach we can reduce health deterioration drastically.
- As we grow older, associated health issues are reported to be a combination of genetics (25%) and lifestyle & environment (75%). This then implies if we manage lifestyles appropriately there is in theory no reason that most of us can't be productive and energetic in our 70s and 80s as we were when we were younger.

# Ageing Workforce

- Many successful employers report the following benefits of employing older workers in a multi-generational workforce include:
  - ✓ Broader range of skills and experience.
  - ✓ Opportunities for mentoring new recruits.
  - ✓ Transfer of skills across workforce.
  - ✓ Reduced staff turnover.
  - ✓ Improved staff morale.
- People over 50 are more increasingly likely to have caring responsibilities for family members and others. Having a workplace that supports flexibility is essential for working carers. Employers should operate flexible working times and allocate shifts that meet individual needs.

# Ageing Workforce

Biological effects of ageing- hearing- structural and sensorineural degeneration occurs throughout auditory system causing age related hearing loss. Varying degrees of hearing loss experienced by older adults often with tinnitus, worsened by occupational exposure to noise.



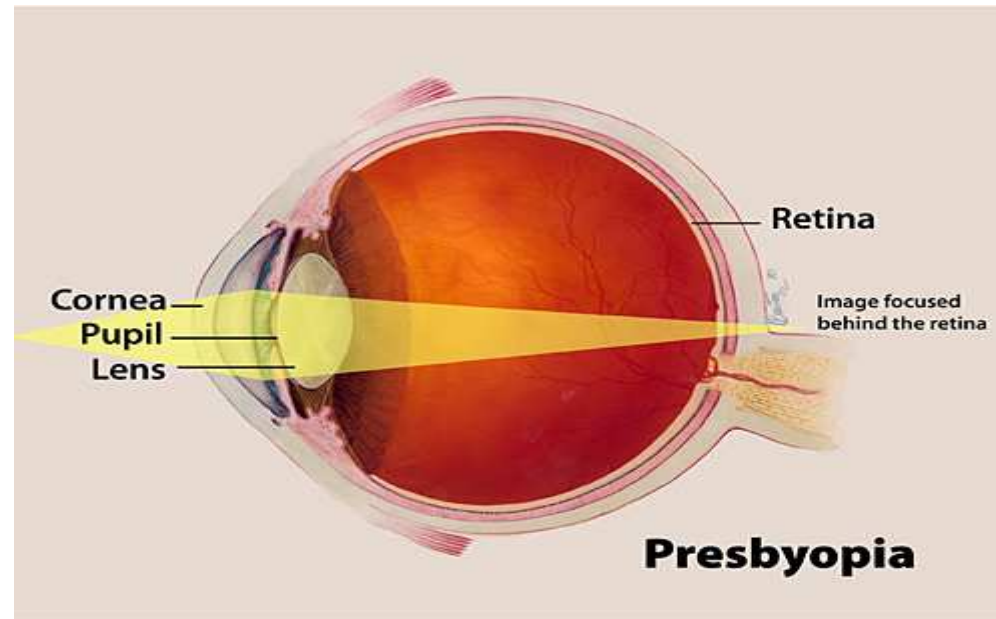


# Ageing Workforce

- Dizziness is common in adults with 25% of 65-69 yr. olds reporting this.
- Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV) is the most common cause of dizziness at all ages and peaks about 60 years of age. (Small crystals of calcium carbonate break loose from their correct position in the balance organ and collect elsewhere, head movements cause false signals to brain)
- Menieres disease is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most commonest in older people. It affects middle age but remains common in older people. (build up of endolymph fluid causing increased pressure in inner ear- vomiting, dizziness, dulled hearing. Exact cause not known but links with poor circulation, viral infections, allergies, migraines, immune system disorders, genetic factors.
- Labyrinthitis – inflammation of labyrinth in inner ear.
- Hearing tests advised 3 yearly for those in noisy workplace. Tests performed more frequently if any impairment.

# Ageing workforce

- Age related visual changes include presbyopia ( inability to focus up close due to refraction (bending)error of light caused by hardening of the lens as we age.



- Myopia- short-sightedness, hyperopia- long sightedness.

# Ageing workforce

- Age related visual changes also include impaired contrast sensitivity, dark adaptation, colour discrimination and peripheral vision.
- Cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, retinal detachment and vitreous separation are all more prevalent with increasing age.
- Impaired vision may affect close detailed work, display screen use and safety critical tasks- in most cases overcome by corrective eye wear or adaptive technology.
- In Occupational health 3 yrly eye tests done using Snellens eye charts or keystone machine. Routine opticians test recommended 2 yearly especially over the age of 40 yrs. Vision test carried out more frequently if any underlying eye condition.

# Ageing Workforce

- Respiratory system reaches maximal function between ages 20-27 yrs of age, thereafter lung function decreases progressively.
- FEV1 (Forced expired volume) and FVC (Forced vital capacity) decrease with age.
- In the absence of disease, the respiratory system remains capable of maintaining adequate gas exchange during entire lifespan.
- Spirometry (Lung function test) carried out in OH on all employees whose role involves dust, chemicals, respiratory sensitisers, recommended 3 yearly. Its also done as a baseline at pre-placement. If any underlying lung conditions i.e asthma test is performed more frequently.

# Ageing Workforce

- Muscle strength and aerobic capacity decline progressively with age.
- Muscle strength peaks around 3<sup>rd</sup> decade and is maintained until 45-50 yrs. of age.
- It declines at an average rate of 12-15 % each decade .
- Those who use physical strength in their jobs retain better strength than those who do not, while an active lifestyle helps to preserve some aerobic capacity.
- Little evidence that these declines in muscle strength and aerobic capacity adversely affect performance.
- Reduced physical capacity is only problematic in jobs with high physical workload. In these cases older workers may benefit from longer recovery periods. Rotation of tasks.
- In most cases people should be capable of continuing to work in their roles despite an increased retirement age.

# Ageing Workforce

- Age related cognitive decline deterioration is not generally marked before the age of 70, and possibly older, with only 5 % of people over 65 showing any sign of cognitive impairment.
- Language ability and the ability to process complex problems improve, in most cases serious decline in memory or intelligence is not apparent until the age of 85. (BMA 2016)
- Onset and impact varies considerably between individuals , influenced by lifestyle factors- regular physical activity positively associated, sedentary behaviour negatively associated with cognitive function over a lifespan.
- Reduced reaction time may only be a problem in high risk environments ; however any evidence related to professional drivers is that slower reaction speed is compensated for by experience.
- Driving accident rates go up with increasing age in general population but this is not reflected among professionals, perhaps as they drive on regular basis while driving declines particularly after retirement. (NHS 2013)

# Ageing workforce

- Some employer concerned that older workers are less productive- no consistent evidence to support this.
- When abilities match job requirements and when experience is considered, there is little difference between performance of older and younger workers.
- Evidence that good timekeeping, helping co-workers, better anger management and people skills increase with age.
- Some studies have also shown that older workers perform better in terms of accuracy and output consistency. (HSE 2011)
- Shift work- ageing associated with changes in circadian rhythm. Evidence suggests that older workers performance is adversely affected by night shifts whilst younger workers performance is adversely affected by morning shifts.
- Time needed for recovery increases with age especially relevant in context of extended 12 hour shifts.

# Ageing workforce



"I was wrong...you can teach  
an old dog new tricks."



Caerphilly County Borough Council  
Occupational Health  
Tredomen House  
Tredomen Park  
Ystrad Mynach  
Hengoed, CF82 7WF

Tel: 01443 863278

Fax: 01443 863183

**Opening Hours: 8.30am – 5.00pm Mon-Thurs  
8.30am – 4.30pm Friday**

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Thank you.

Any questions?

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