

# Doctors say more geriatric research and programs should focus on successful aging

July 15 2015, by Wendy Halik

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A majority of studies done on senior citizens focus on frailty, but only a small percentage of older adults are actually frail. In "Failing to focus on healthy aging: A frailty of our discipline?" set to be published in the *Journal of American Geriatrics Society*, Highland Hospital physicians Susan Friedman, M.D., M.P.H., Krupa Shah, M.D., and William Hall, M.D. call on geriatricians nationwide to provide leadership for keeping older adults healthy as opposed to just focusing on care that is provided after people become ill.

The doctors reviewed relevant field research and found that studies on frailty are far more common in geriatric literature than those targeting successful or healthy aging. Successful aging has a variety of definitions. It can mean the absence of disease while maintaining physical and cognitive function, but it can also include positive coping, freedom, comfort resources, independence and beneficial contribution to society.

The concept of successful aging is more critical than ever before because of the rapidly growing number of seniors. Drs. Friedman, Shah and Hall acknowledge that there is a shortage of geriatricians in this country and currently most of them are caring for frail elderly with multiple chronic conditions. "But if nothing is done to delay older people becoming frail we will continue to drain clinical and financial resources, and [older adults](#) will have a poorer quality of life as they age," said Dr. Friedman.

In Monroe County and across the U.S., the combination of an increased life expectancy and an aging baby boomer population means the number

of people over 65 is growing rapidly. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 500 New Yorkers are expected to turn 65 every day in the next few years. In 2010, one in seven people in Monroe County was over the age of 65, and in 2035 it is projected to be one in five. According to Dr. Friedman, "We know many of the successful elements that contribute to aging well. What we need to do is to understand which elements are most important, and to develop environments to allow [healthy aging](#) to be the norm."

Drs. Hall, Friedman, and Shah specialize in geriatrics at Highland Hospital. In addition to practicing medicine, Dr. Friedman also co-teaches a course on successful aging for seniors at OASIS. Located on Monroe Avenue in Rochester, OASIS provides classes on a wide range of topics to anyone over the age of 50. The successful aging course teaches seniors how to optimize healthy living based on the results of studies conducted around the world that show what works best.

Provided by University of Rochester

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