

Ageing: the most significant chronic condition!



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My challenge...

- **My challenge in presenting this topic is to be able make clear what *I* mean.**
- **I do not constitute ageing as a situation of despair by saying that it is the most significant chronic condition**
- **I do not constitute people living with chronic conditions as always being people living with despair**



Some Questions ?

What counts as life?

What counts as death?

What meaning of life/death have you learnt?

What meaning of life/death are you learning?



The WHO (2005) state ...

- ...the number of people, families and communities that are *afflicted by death* from chronic diseases is increasing and is a threat that causes poverty and hinders the economic development of many countries.
... with increased investment in chronic disease prevention ... it will be possible to prevent 36 million *premature* deaths.



‘Afflicted’ by death?

- “Most of us think it is wrong to kill people. Some think it is wrong in all circumstances, while others think that in special circumstances some killing may be justified. ...” (Glover, 1977)
- “One reason it is wrong to kill is that it is wrong to destroy a life which is worth living... What is a life worth living?” (Glover, 1977)



- **Is life living with a chronic condition a life not worth living?**
- **Is death because of chronic conditions killing?**
- **Is ageing with a chronic condition killing yourself?**



Dates for death?

- The use of the word 'premature' suggests that the expected length of time has not been reached that in turn suggests there may be dates for expected deaths to occur.
- **BUT** quality we know is not always related to quantity and there are a multiplicity of different views about what constitutes quality.



Preventing *premature* death

- Talk of preventing premature death occurs when the body is considered as a ‘stable point of reference’.
- As a stable point of reference (Bauman, 1992) bodies are capable of being changed in pre-determined ways.
- The age of a person, and how they age (how they live life), become used as a measurement of a death that could have been prevented.



The body as a stable point of reference

- Precisely because bodily life produces death, bodily life has also produced corpses or bodies that can be examined, gazed upon and organs removed to argue that in doing this ‘we’ progress ways of living and can improve health; people can live longer (live to their expected date of death?).



- ‘each *particular* case of death’ (read chronic condition) has generated new understandings about life and living to the extent that the view promulgated is that death (read chronic condition) ‘can be resisted, postponed or avoided altogether’ (Bauman, 1992: 5).



- But repeating Bauman, life is not fixed or stasis nor could it ever be.
- As mortal beings, from the time of conception ageing and death are givens.
- This then makes ageing a significant event and what will people die from if not chronic conditions? Trauma? Killing?



Predicting expected life years

- As a measurement, ageing can be viewed as biological failure and the success or otherwise of surviving death
- As a measurement ageing can also be viewed as a chance to taste and enjoy immortality (Bauman)



A child is born

- People of the world have in a multiplicity of ways attempted to intervene in the lives of children born (how lives are lived)
- People of the world have in a multiplicity of ways attempted to decide the fate of the earth and of children born (how lives are lived or children not born)



Learning from people

- “There is very little satisfaction to be had in averting births... There is much more satisfaction to be had from keeping alive the babies who are already there, in improving the health of their mothers... There is even more satisfaction in learning from the people just how amazing human beings are...” (Germaine Greer, 1984)



Australia's *health* 2006

Health is clearly a growing sector of the economy and health is growing faster than the economy. A global trend is that relative changes in prices in health goods and health services has outstripped inflation.



Health expenditure...

Health expenditure has increased significantly in Australia

AIHW say real growth in expenditure in Australia appears to be in pharmaceuticals (PBS) and hospitals (public).



Drivers...

- Increased spending on keeping people healthy.
- Drivers are age and female maternal costs.
- Children who before may have died and people generally are living longer because of improved health services and health goods.
- For example in 1900's 1 in 10 deaths at birth and now in 2000's 4 in 1000 deaths at birth and Australia is fourth in the world for the longest life expectancy.
- A major driver is that there is increasing access of older people to ALL health services.



Health care as a dream industry

Increase in expenditure has added \$78.6 billion to the economy, provides over 700,000 jobs (of which 570,000 are specific health occupations and this is a 26% overall increase since 2000), exploits new technology and continues to grow suggesting it could be considered a 'dream industry'.



Health care as a drain on the economy

Can also consider health care as a drain though as it is taking away money, distracting people away from other jobs, it is growing and private spending increased and there are 8 out of 10 Australians dissatisfied with health system.



Ageing – in whose hands?

- If health expenditure is increasing and the aim is to decrease expenditure how will this occur?
- In whose hands will decisions be made about who can live (and live in what way) and who can have what?



The problem of chronic conditions

- **Setting out to solve ‘the problem of chronic conditions’ is no different to people of the world attempting to intervene in the lives of children born.**
- **From one perspective, a child who is not born will not have to experience chronic conditions...!**



Challenging ageing ...

- How we die is being considered not only by many survivors as having difficulty accepting death because of being separated from the person who dies, but also because how we age and hence how we die is costly to society.
- Ageing and hence dying in a particular way is something that is being challenged.



Preventing chronic conditions?

- Thinking of life as our *only* chance to taste and enjoy immortality may focus the prioritizing of some people to believe preventing chronic conditions is as simple as adopting some pre-determined practices.
- In adopting these practices the outcome for some people may be considered to be the prevention of chronic conditions.



To be human...

- To be human or to be inside a mortal life says Bauman, “one can taste immortality, even if only metaphorically or metonymically’ (2001a; 2, 247). Being alive is for consumers their only chance to taste and enjoy immortality.



Bauman says that

- ‘the odds are that most of human life and most of human lives will be spent agonizing about the choice of goals, rather than finding the means to the ends which do not call for reflection’ (2000: 61).



- To be in good health says Bauman, has been turned into a permanent war against disease (Bauman, 2000). In turn, what has emerged, according to Bauman, is the concept 'liquid life' that emphasizes the actions of consumers and the choices they need to make.



Bauman says:

Liquid life means constant self-scrutiny, self-critique and self-censure. Liquid life feeds on the self's dissatisfaction with *itself* (2005: 10-11, emphasis in original).

- The health consumer is expected to be dissatisfied with the self and to always seek being better.



- I agree with Bauman who says that many consumers want the freedom to make their own lifestyle choices and at the same time to have the ‘freedom from bearing the consequences of wrong choices’ (Bauman, 2000; 89).



Ageing – in whose hands?

- **At an individual level people are told that they have different opportunities for life-style choices while we know many have not only no choice about their health before birth but also at birth and beyond.**
- **But more and more attention is focussed on people ‘making good choices, only good choices and even better choices’ (Bauman, 1992: 4)**



Bauman writes...

- The world full of possibilities is like a buffet table set with mouth-watering dishes, too numerous for the keenest of eaters to hope to taste them all. The diners are *consumers*, and the most taxing and irritating of the challenges consumers confront is the need to establish priorities: the necessity to forsake some unexplored options and to leave them unexplored. The consumers' misery derives from the surfeit, not the dearth of choices. (Bauman, 2000; 63 his emphasis)



Bauman (2000) says

- Under the new circumstances, the odds are that most of human life and most of human lives will be spent agonizing about the choice of goals, rather than finding the means to the ends which do not call for reflection. (Bauman, 2000; 61)



Ageing: a significant chronic condition

- The struggles people confront in the messiness that is life makes ageing a significant chronic condition.
- But in whose hands will decisions be made about how a child born will age and what will influence these decisions?



Australia's health 2006

- Available for free at:
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10321>

