Preface
Toward Improving the Care of Older Adults

Beautiful young people are accidents of nature, but beautiful old people are works of art.
—Eleanor Roosevelt

In this era of evidence-based medicine, the practice of geriatric medicine stands out as an area whereby guidelines are often not easily applied. Sometimes this is due to a lack of evidence because clinical trials only rarely include frail, medically complex, or very old persons. Other times, evidence pertinent to the patient’s issue at hand is available, but the application is complicated due to guidelines that may be overlapping or conflicting and may not match the care preferences of an older adult with multiple medical and psychosocial problems. Following guidelines designed for younger adults can even lead to harm in the elderly, for example, when strict blood pressure control contributes to falls. The aging of the Baby Boomers creates the imperative that all generalists be prepared for the challenges inherent in caring for older adults. We must be prepared to move past simple application of guidelines to an approach to the older patient that minimizes disability and maximizes quality of life.

This issue of Medical Clinics of North America considers important issues in the care of older adults with a focus on providing approaches to optimizing care of elderly persons with common and challenging conditions. Geriatricians are taught a syndromes-based, holistic approach to the patient encounter that strives to reduce disability and align care with the patient’s social situation and goals. This conceptual framework is essential in developing an approach to the care of the elderly patient. Authors review important aspects of this approach in articles about geriatric syndromes and assessment, cancer screening in older adults, and polypharmacy and rational prescribing. Tools to help assess prognosis, promote discussion of patient care preferences, and complete advance directives are provided.
Next, we have attempted to review specific issues that primary providers face every day when caring for older adults. Key aspects of geriatric medicine and overarching problems such as evaluating cognitive concerns and managing pain are reviewed. The use of newer medications and application of guidelines pertinent to specific medical conditions are considered in articles devoted to diabetes, hypertension, urinary incontinence, sleep disorders, and anticoagulation in atrial fibrillation in older adults.

It is our hope that the articles contained herein will provide new information and insights to help primary care providers enhance their care of older adults. We are grateful to the outstanding group of educators and clinicians who have contributed articles to this effort.

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