

PLACEMENT OF SOCIAL GERONTOLOGIST WITHIN A SOCIAL WELFARE INSTITUTION

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Abstract: Aging can be defined as the gradual decline of physical and cognitive functions, which develops over the time and causes a decrease in the adaptive capabilities of the organism. In the near future, the dramatic increase in the demand for care and special protection will present the generation of eighty years or older people. Elderly patients will need competent caregivers, who will understand that many functional changes are part of the normal aging process and not merely a consequence of a disease. In this role, we recognize the competence of a social gerontologist, who has specific knowledge in fields such as motivation, leadership, teamwork, communication, negotiation, coaching and mentoring. Using the literature and through the perspective of our vision of the current situation, we present in the article a vision of the necessary changes in the development of human resources and creating an environment of social responsibility where the impact of the manipulation and different interests become as low as possible with the aim of creating new forms of coexistence, to reduce social exclusion of older people, to improve social welfare and intergenerational dialogue.

Keywords: Elderly, human resources, social responsibility, competences, social gerontologist

UMESTITEV SOCIALNEGA GERONTOLOGA V STRUKTURE SOCIALNO VARSTVENEGA ZAVODA

Povzetek: Staranje lahko opredelimo kot postopno upadanje telesnih in kognitivnih funkcij, ki se s časom razvija in povzroča zmanjšanje adaptacijske sposobnosti organizma. V bližnji prihodnosti bo skokovito povečanje potreb po oskrbi in posebnem varstvu predstavljala generacija osemdeset in več letnih starostnikov. Starostniki bodo potrebovali kompetentne oskrbovalce, ki bodo razumeli, da so številne funkcionalne spremembe del normalnega procesa staranja in ne zgolj posledica bolezni. V tej vlogi prepoznavamo kompetence socialnega gerontologa, ki obvladuje specifična znanja s področij kot so motivacija, vodenje, timsko delo, komunikacija, pogajanje, coaching in mentoring. V članku s pomočjo literature in skozi perspektivo našega videnja trenutnega stanja predstavljamo vizijo potrebnih sprememb pri razvoju kadrov in vzpostavitvi okolja družbene odgovornosti, kjer postane vpliv manipulacij in različnih interesov čim manjši s ciljem kreiranja novih oblik sobivanja za zmanjševanje socialne izključenosti starejših, za izboljšanje socialne blaginje in med generacijskega dialoga.

Ključne besede : Starostnik, človeški resursi, družbena odgovornost, kompetence, socialni gerontolog

1. Introduction

In the countries of the European or Western culture, the proportion of elderly people is becoming so high that it brings an extremely difficult task for the orderly functioning of the society and the state, even for the survival of

culture (Ramovš, 2003). Demographic analyses in recent decades draw attention to an intense aging of the world population. Data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia shows that almost 345,000 people are older than 65 years in Slovenia, which amounts to 16.8% of the total population. Average age of the population increased from 38.8 years in 2000 to 41.8 years in 2011. During this period life expectancy also increased from 71.9 years for men and 79.1 years for women to 76.6 years for men and 82.9 years for women. The number of people in homes for the elderly has increased in the last eleven years from 11,905 people to 17,009; an increase of 43% (Grm in Rejec, 2013). In the last two years, the number has declined because many elderly people are not able to pay the costs and are leaving the homes for the elderly. Meanwhile, „a family that has been the main supplier throughout the history and even today has increasing difficulties to perform this task because of the way of modern life“ (Ramovš, Lipar, & Ramovš, 2012, p. 6). Extension of lifetime is the result of medicalization, and the reduction of mortality through improved health services in the developed world, resulting in the increase of chronic diseases typical for older people. Diseases of the elderly are difficult to cure. They are often chronic and the treatment is very demanding and expensive. We would not be so much aware of the aging problems, if they do not follow the increased pressure on the pension fund and frequent disease development, which presents the continual increase of the health care budget. Nowadays, many people are pushing to the forefront the reflection the economic aspects of the problem, the sociological issues remain somewhat aside, which can lead us to the intensification of the intergenerational conflict, which in our opinion is already taking place in a mild form. The separation of people into a group of elderly people and a group that is not yet old is pointless, but very present. In Slovenia, debates on the pension reform are lasting for years. Media display the reasons for it and they additionally contribute to the disordered picture and view on age and elderly people. Hostile attitude towards elderly people can also be seen elsewhere in the world, for example, the statement of Japanese Minister Taro Aso (2013) that older people should be allowed to die quicker because the payment of health care for older people is a burden for the country. Even before that, in 2008 he publicly wondered „Why paying for people who just drink and eat?“, and he spoke jokes several times at the expense of patient with Alzheimer. Because of these and many other reasons is the concern for positive perception of aging and age very important. Content enrichment of social development, which the age contributes, is not recognized. With pushing off the age from everyday life, we do a great disservice to ourselves because aging is our common feature. Ageing takes place through the whole life, but in fact, we hardly become aware of this until we get old. „When we are born, we are born into life as well as death“ (Trstenjak, 1993, p. 9). Policy makers in collaboration with the profession (Social Gerontology) have to find answers to the question, how to move forward, and redefine the relationships between the generations. According to Špidl (2012) it is the issues of cultural compliance in the society that many would like to reduce only to the economic political issue. In order to survive together in the society, people should not focus on the production and provision of resources only in technical terms. Labor productivity increased in the developed countries even thirty to forty times. The number of elderly people did not grow with such rapidity. „Regardless of the fact that the majority of older people are staying in their home environment, where they receive help from their closest family members, part of the elderly use or receive various forms of socially organized forms of services. Both areas require careful consideration of the sociological, psychological, and social aspects“ (Imperl, 2012). It is a question of solidarity and awareness that every human being has its value. The focus of Social Gerontology needs to be directed to organizational forms that will be the building blocks of the new, innovative and creative solutions for the productive age and improving the quality of life of the elderly population. In this form of social responsibility we depend on human potentials as the driving force of new potentials and development. Care for the elderly is a social responsibility.

2. Changes

Turbulent environment in which we live requires constant change. Changes are the only constant of the dynamics of the social, technological, economic and organizational development" (Ovsenik and Ambrož, 2010). Organizations need to change and are constantly changing, although not always in the direction that we want. The values are changing; the economic crisis and social stratification increase, and more and more elderly people are lonely and pushed to the margins of society. Portugal's known sociologist, Almeida Pinto says that these are global problems dealt with by the growing number of intergenerational projects and programs. "However, experts working in individual intergenerational practices have no common standards regarding intergenerational learning because of their different educational backgrounds and the use of different methods, strategies and tools when preparing the lesson plans" (Pinto, 2012). New models of intergenerational relations and new forms of education and training system must be based on creativity and innovation. In our opinion, the furthest in this direction in the Slovenian territory, came Alma Mater Europaea- European Centre Maribor. These modern approaches in study programs, in which the students acquire knowledge and skills to cope with the challenges imposed by the modern views of the management and treatment of the elderly, pave the way for positive changes. We are talking mainly about the study program Social Gerontology, which aims to make a paradigm shift that requires changes in the system of values and behavior that are changes in organizational culture and climate, as well as training of the doctoral students for

competent management processes in geriatric services. The imperative of doctoral study is the empowerment of doctoral candidates in their creation in the area of social gerontology required competences. The implementation of social gerontologist who in the course of their education gained theoretical and practical knowledge and skills in the form of gerontological, psychosocial, methodological, medical and organizational management skills in the organizational structure of the social welfare institution, will result a new momentum in maximizing cognitive and physical functioning of the elderly.

3. Social Welfare Institutions

Signs of time call for the search for the new forms of organization, new skills and self-development, which have the goal of dynamic responses to the dynamics of change. In the light of the aging population, the care for the elderly requires appropriate changes which would be already very late. If we want successful homes for the elderly that are especially friendly towards older people, we have to design models of care that take into account a wide spectrum of psycho-social and health needs of the elderly that need an individualized approach. The main goal should be maximization of the physical and cognitive functioning of the elderly. Existing models show signs of obsolescence, because the generalization of services and guidance to the health needs do not belong in the homes for elderly, but in nursing institutions and hospitals. The consequences can be seen in the older people's fear of homes for elderly, as well as in the occurrence of depression in these institutions (Lešnik in Ferenčina, 2013). Generalizing problems that elderly people have in these days to predominantly health problems could be very dangerous. Modern thinking and changes that are connected to older people as a fast growing group of the population require the implementation of new forms of social welfare institutions in which the social gerontologists are an important subject in achieving these goals. As long as the cognitive functions are preserved, the care of the elderly for their own health is quite good, but at their deterioration it significantly decreases. „Watching elderly people, especially in homes for the elderly, we see the typical diseases and conditions: intellectual decline (dementia, delirium), incontinence, instability (falls), motionlessness, malnutrition, weakness, deafness and visual impairment“ (Kocijan, 2002). Such conditions can be improved by the modern medicine, but in most cases only partly, because the decline in the abilities is conditioned by the aging of cells on which modern medicine has no great influence. Change of social welfare institutions into almost entirely medical institutions transfers the focus on health care issues of people in care, where a number of related psychological problems remain unsolved and the needs and desires of older people are unfulfilled.

4. Competences of a Social Gerontologist

Rare individuals have the natural power to act successfully and spontaneously at the integration in the structure of the organization. For the successful functioning of the organization it is necessary to have a mix of specific knowledge, skills and competences acquired through different processes. The acquisition of competences takes place through various channels, including successful academic education, further education on various trainings and gaining experience at work. Competences that an individual acquires during the education are usually quite clearly defined. Determination of the competences of team members, formalization of their roles and work processes are developed in the organization itself, improving communication and cooperation. Progress in the career, and development and creation of personal competence model is in the interest of the individual as well as organizations in which he or she operates.

The social gerontologists should in their broad spectrum of competences ensure the career growth and development of their colleagues and themselves, which is a basic model for the success of the organization.

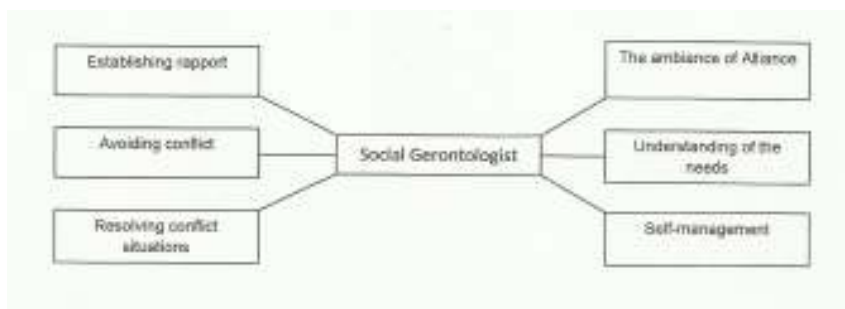


Figure 1: Development model of competences of the social gerontologist

1. Establishing rapport with everyone and everything which includes establishing the skills and communicating with all participants that are treating the elderly.
2. Techniques for avoiding conflicts not based on ignoring of conflicts, but rather preventing the formation of conflicts as much as possible.
3. Resolving conflict situations, based on mutual trust and freedom of opinion and decision making.
4. Building an ambience of Alliance, based on the connection of team members, which differ in their perspectives and cultural, ethical, and professional qualities.
5. To understand others and their needs because every person has the need for respect, trust, reciprocity, adequate communication, as well as their own specific values.
6. Self-management techniques, particularly reverence, determination, motivation.

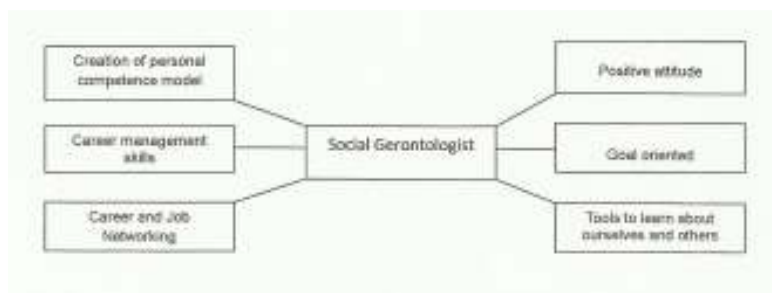


Figure 2: Development of personal competence and career plan

1. Creating a personal competency model as a method of personal evaluation and monitoring of progress in personal and professional development.
2. Career management skills that are aimed to learn about ones' own interests and career goals.
3. Career and job networking as a method to find a job.
4. Positive attitude. Problem is a challenge and not just part of the path to achieve our own goals.
5. Goal oriented to the successful realization of the set demanding tasks.
6. Tools to learn about one-selves and others. Flexibility and tolerance are developed.

Absence of either theoretical or practical knowledge in the field of personal career development and competences causes a deficit of essential skills and it impoverishes the individual's ability in holistic management and problem solving. Social gerontologist presents a person who is the designer of the future economic, health, social and demographic policies, which set out the deal with the patient/the client in the center, promotes interdisciplinary and connection of different sectors (social workers, healthcare workers, volunteers), encourages teamwork and systemic approach, while establishing quality systems and measurement of these, based on the highest value-the satisfaction of the clients.

5. Development of Human resources

Social gerontologists are researchers and practitioners dealing with the sociological, psychological and biological aspects of aging, examining the physical, mental and social changes due to aging. Aging can be examined through four processes: chronological aging, biological aging, psychological aging and sociological aging. Acquired knowledge is directed into national policy and training programs that deal with social protection and care of the elderly. In the development of human resources that are needed in the treatment of the elderly in health or social care institution, such as target management, positive leadership, leadership through the example, giving feedback, and others. This would avoid the problem in the organization of human resources, lack of certain profiles, recently often mentioned stress, mobbing and burnout in the workplace. The knowledge and skills in the orderly's learning processes have not been obtained, but the leaders need it at work very much. This means that the institutions involved in the care of older people face a crisis in human resources, which is a reflection of poor career development of the employees. Every organization that wants to survive a tough fight in the changed conditions of work must adapt and change its traditional approach of managing the employees. Theory and practice have already demonstrated that without the right people who have adequate knowledge, skills, experience, are flexible and have the qualities and values that are expected from them one cannot fulfill the set goals. Employees need to know and be

aware of the planned path of development of the organization, adapt to the needs and standards of the working process, develop and update their skills, abilities, and look for new methods, approaches and paths to more satisfied users of services. In the area of comprehensive care for the elderly who need institutional care, as well as those who live in their home environment, changes take place slowly and often in the wrong direction. The requirement of today is to work actively in order to create an environment that will absorb the creative and innovative ideas in each part of the functioning. In organizations dominated by the hierarchy of organizational culture, which is characterized by the control over the work done by the subordinated, does not encourage professional development and autonomy of the employees. One must create conditions that make the employees feel that they are an important part in achieving these goals and can therefore participate actively. Good management and leadership that are able to motivate employees for the change are elements that are required at all levels of the organization. Those survive who can find motivated and competent employees, recognize their potential and integrate them in the systematical development. Job satisfaction is only possible, if we manage to overcome conflicts and move towards a common goal. Good organizational climate is important because people who work together and have a good relation are achieving encouraging results, are well motivated to work, and are more successful. The educational goal of any professional group is that its members provide the values, behaviors and knowledge that are indispensable for them. It is important to be aware of their leadership role in the organization and do everything possible to create a pleasant environment for the employees. The attention should not be focused solely on profit and technology, but on knowledge, creative individuals and well-functioning teams. People are the ones who shape the vision, determine the mission, create a culture, set the values, and accept the strategies to achieve them. Due to the changes one must identify new opportunities and develop new approaches to the overall quality treatment for the elderly. If one succeeds, then this is a sign of rebirth, which brings success and satisfaction of all participants. The satisfaction can be explained by effective management, communication, teamwork and interpersonal relations among employees.

6. Conclusions

Values of caring for others are in the era of increasingly aging society facing major challenges and trials since in the active period are coming few generations who will have to care for the growing number of elderly. The fact is that the current form of organized health and social care cannot provide high-quality treatment for elderly as vulnerable population groups. There are more and more elderly who need institutional support. Institutionalization in the form that one knows today presents for many a very difficult step due to the subjective difficulties, problems with the change of the living environment, as well as financial problems. Age brings many changes, which can be the source of different distresses, especially when they occur suddenly. The most common sources of distress for the elderly belong to various losses and the dependence on the assistance from others. In the future, this will essentially change the way of thinking and the care in social-care institutions. The structures on the level of countries have already produced various certificates and recognitions from the quality system, which indirectly exclude the patient/client as the sole user of health/welfare services. One must involve the subjective thinking and satisfaction of the patient/client in the planning model of quality of work and services, because patients/clients are the only true evaluators. The problem of health and social care institutions and health care professionals, such as service providers is that they only recognized the quality and the achievement of specified international standards and criteria. This is especially expressed in the institutions where the last word belongs to economists and managers, who have very little experience and contact with chronically ill elderly that are the most common users of social welfare institutions. They rarely take into consideration the subjective opinions of the service users; their view at the functioning of the institute is solely from the aspect of financial sustainability, or even profit. Unlike the leadership of the institution, the elderly see the services only in a subjective way and often under the influence of illness, psychological status, education and the resulting social situation. The quality of the treatment of the elderly is gaining the importance considering the rising costs of medical treatments, limited resources and the need for special standards in practice. That is why most homes for the elderly are changing rapidly into nursing institutions or places where people are just waiting for death. Homes for elderly became an almost exclusively medical institution rather than care institutions, as they should be. Many people that are in old age are still healthy enough for quality, even for creative and independent living. Different needs of the elderly are well preserved like the different abilities of the elderly. For some just the feeling is sufficient that, in the case of serious problems, they can rely on caring children and grandchildren, while for others the good quality of life cannot be ensured in their home environment and they are forced to decide to stay in homes for elderly. We are obliged to ensure the conditions following the example of the Scandinavian countries. The economic crisis cannot be an excuse for hesitation and inactivity. Requirement of the civilization is a change that has the aim of creating new forms of coexistence to reduce the social exclusion of the elderly for improving social welfare and the dialog between generations.

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