



Parliamentary and Scientific Committee



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Preparing for the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on older people?

Social distancing, face coverings and track and trace are just a few of the many ways our everyday lives have been changed this year. From work and studies to our family and social lives, Covid-19 has affected us all but, unfortunately some lives have been affected more than others. This discussion meeting focused around The Physiological Societies Report about 'preparing for the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on older people'. Professor David Patterson gave a brief introduction to the report before three insightful presentations from our guest speakers; Dr Alison Giles, Professor Paul Greenhaff, and Dr Claire Steves.

Despite people of all ages catching Covid-19 across the UK, the evidence has proved that older people have a much greater risk of a negative experience from the virus. Statistics have also shown that more than 4 in 5 of those who lost their lives were over 70. One of the many issues older people face during recovery is rapid and significant muscle loss. Greenhaff highlighted that although some of this muscle mass can be rebuilt through supported exercise and physiotherapy, for those who are frailer this can be incredibly challenging.

The importance of exercise was a key point which ran through the presentations and the following Q&A. From home workouts to walking around the block, partaking in

any form of exercise is positive and for older people it can be vital for maintaining mobility. However, many found themselves doing less exercise than before the pandemic and finding it especially hard to maintain active during self-isolation. Giles relayed the idea of having online and televised at home workout sessions available which are targeted towards older people. This combined with the reopening of outdoor sports, such as golf and bowls, could be key in keeping the older generation active and healthy.

With the news of the vaccine being announced only minutes before the meeting, it reiterated the importance of exercise and healthy living. Steves informed us that physical exercise and activity may help in improving immunology. Therefore, despite the current uncertainties surrounding this new vaccine, it is possible that a healthy and active lifestyle could aid the individual's vaccine response.

Ensuring older people maintain and improve their physical health is incredibly important, however it is also crucial that their mental health is too. 2020 has been a difficult year and many older people have experienced increased feelings of anxiety and depression during this uncertain time. Suggestions ranging from widening social bubbles to increased support from the NHS

and volunteers were highlighted by the speakers as possible responses to this decline in mental wellbeing. However, it is important that any services and facilities put in place reflect the environment and situations of those in need.

The three speakers alongside the report presented a clear action plan to help reduce the negative impacts of Covid-19 on older people. The importance of a healthy and active lifestyle alongside having a strong support network are at the core of this national resilience program. As the virus continues to affect us all, it's vital that both the Government and us as individuals focus our attention on supporting older people in communities.

Charlotte Hall

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