

ABSTRACT

There is now increasing acknowledgement of the importance of geriatrics. In Jamaica the geriatric population (≥ 60 years old) rose from 6.1% in 1921 to 9.6% in 1982. With greater emphasis on geriatric care research is needed to identify the main areas of need so as to plan effectively for optimum utilisation of resources.

The Golden Age Home, Kingston, Jamaica, was developed as a model geriatric institution, combining modern physical facilities and design with the concept of the elderly actively participating in its functioning. Although essentially a home for the "well elderly", aging is invariably associated with some medical problems, consequently, this study analysed the health related problems of residents and ascertained the opinions of the staff towards the home.

Medical assessment of the residents was performed between August 1985 and February 1986. This examined the age/sex profile, the reasons for admission and the most common chronic illnesses and disabilities. Staff members completed a questionnaire investigating their training background and opinions on the home.

The largest single group of the residents (29.4%) were in the 70 to 79 age group. The sex ratios varied at different ages. Males to females were in the ratio 3 to 2 in the 60 to 79 age group, whereas there was a 2 to 1 female preponderance in those 80 years old and over.

The most common reason for admission, other than advanced age, was mental retardation, and this sub-population was mainly in the 20 to 29 age group.

The most prevalent chronic illness, hypertension, occurred in 19% of residents. Visual impairment and impaired mobility were the most common disabilities occurring in 45.8% and 46% of the residents respectively. Only 9% of the residents were free of both chronic illnesses or disabilities, 26.2% having one and 29.6% having two complaints.

The staff questionnaire provided information about their concepts of the good points of the home, the problems and suggested improvements. The needed improvements included:

- 1) more activities, including occupational therapy and rehabilitation;
- 2) improved water supply;
- 3) more facilities, equipment and drugs; and
- 4) improvement in inter-personal relationships.

Based on the findings, recommendations were made towards improving conditions at the home and areas for further research were identified. Overall, a study of the Golden Age Home, should provide useful information relevant to delivery of care in geriatric institutions in the Caribbean region.