

Bring Your Own Idea Program
Proposal to the Provost's Office, Washington University in St. Louis
Changing Demography and Lifestyle: Impact on Health and Society

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Summary: People are greatly influenced by their surroundings and lifestyle choices. Not only the natural and physical environment, but our rapidly changing surroundings has impacted the health and society. On the one hand digital revolution is immensely empowering the people and healthcare, on the other hand technology has made people less physically active. Sedentary lifestyle is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide and the future predictions are alarming. Sedentary lifestyle, high-sugar high-fat modern diet and other lifestyle-related factors have impacted the physical and psychological health of both children and adults. Lifestyle choices ingrained during childhood tend to pass on to adulthood as the younger generation gets older. Lifestyle diseases, such as atherosclerosis, diabetes, obesity, heart diseases and stroke are on the rise and also contribute to the decreasing fertility rate and increasing age-related dementia and disability. Long-term care in the baby-boomer generation is in crisis. For the first time in human history, in next three years, we will have more aged people than children and more people at extreme old age. There will be fewer young people to take care of older people. With the increase in life expectancy and declining fertility rate, the percentage of the older population will rise sharply, which will present unprecedented challenges. Emerging physical and psychological health issues not only affect the patient and family, but also impact the society at large. The change in demography, requirement of prolonged health care and rise of health care costs in this ageing world poses new economic and social security challenges and raise new moral and ethical issues.

To remain relevant to these emerging health and societal challenges, we need to help discover the solutions and also equip the next generation. Washington University has excellent resources, however, spread across various departments across the schools that can be utilized in this direction to fulfil this unmet need. The objective of the proposal is to bring together expert faculty from various departments to dissect these emerging problems through various perspectives, which will plant the seed for new research collaborations and design a new cross-school curriculum. Some of the questions discussed will be how demographic changes, lifestyle choices and prolonged life expectancy affect physical and psychological health, and society? Are these health and social adversities inevitable, or can we act to forestall or minimize it? Will our brain cope-up with changing surroundings and lifestyle or age faster and affect mental health? How the lifestyle choices in the younger generation can be corrected now to tackle the future challenges? Will the aging world have a longer period of good health, societal participation and productivity, or will it be limited by more illness, disability and dependency? How will these issues bear upon society and strain ethics and public policy? Attitudes, behavior, values and policies appropriate for the next period and for new demographic realities, needs to be reflected to deal with current and future healthcare and population patterns. Through the proposed program, cumulative experience and expertise from the faculties across the boundaries of various departments and schools not only will provide a unique perspective on these emerging healthcare and social challenges but will also suggest the potential solutions. It will forge new partnerships in research and develop a new cross-school course directed toward equipping next generation of students with the ability to effectively contribute in addressing these issues. Beside research oriented discussion every faculty meeting will have a set agenda to discuss forming a cross-school curriculum on this emerging challenge. A specific cross-school curriculum will be shaped over the course of meetings from March to October, 2017, and will be discussed with the Provost Office at the final meeting in November, 2017.

Format: Luncheon meeting

Confirmed Participating Faculty

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