

A mature vision

In this engaging interview, **Professor Jean Woo** explains how Hong Kong's growing elderly population can be empowered through prioritising age-related health and societal issues in the community



When and why was the Cadenza project established?

As with other developed regions, Hong Kong's population is ageing rapidly, and health and social services are struggling to meet the needs of the elderly. Unfortunately, there is a pervasive culture that places great value on youth while marginalising older people at all levels of society. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust – one of the biggest philanthropic organisations in Hong Kong – established the Cadenza Project in late 2006. The project seeks to change the negative societal perception of ageing, empower older people by raising issues related to health and ageing, and motivate tertiary academic institutions to make ageing a priority area in undergraduate education and research. A further aim is to encourage existing service providers to develop community models of care that are fit for purpose.

What types of training programmes do you offer to welfare and medical professionals?

The main training programme for health and social care professionals is an online course, which is supplemented by seminars. The content is very broad and covers all aspects of ageing. It consists of five broad themes: successful ageing and intergenerational solidarity; psychosocial and spiritual care; chronic disease management and end-of-life care; dementia (preventive and supportive care); community and residential care for older people.

How do you empower the elderly and encourage mediation to reduce senior citizen abuse in the city?

The first step is to publicise the service providers that help older people who are being verbally, physically or financially abused. One major obstacle, however, is the lack of resources that the government has devoted to such services. The Social Welfare Department has a hotline for reporting the abuse of the elderly, and cases are then handled by social workers. This is primarily targeted towards healthcare professionals and there are not enough resources or awareness on how these cases should be handled.

The Cadenza Project has provided support to a Hong Kong-based NGO that has been carrying out work in the area of senior citizen abuse. This has resulted in the establishment of a dedicated mediation service, and also the publication of a handbook detailing the different service providers, and what they offer, through a series of case studies.

Do you engage with other age groups to inform them of the value of preserving traditional cultures and caring for the elderly?

Intergenerational involvement is a key feature of the Cadenza Project; for example, we ran a photo competition to highlight the positive aspects of ageing, which many young people entered. We also ran a short film competition for secondary school students who submitted films relating to six public education themes, including communication problems, caring for those with a disability and loving and respecting older relatives. One community project by an NGO in the southern part of Hong Kong runs programmes where older volunteers help students with homework and co-write story books.

Have collaborations with NGOs and academic institutions yielded positive outcomes for your research?

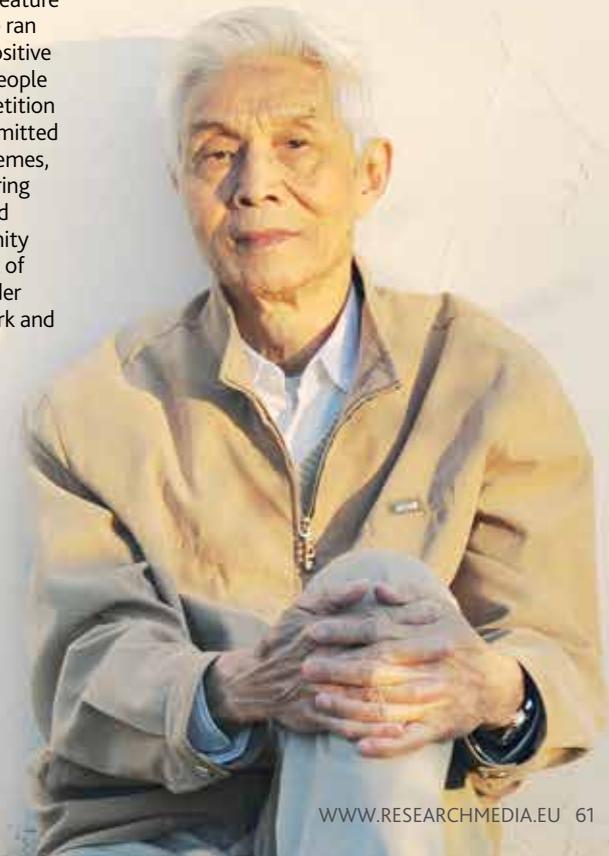
Since the areas that I work in are cross-disciplinary, and Hong Kong is a small place, collaboration is important for gathering available expertise. It also provides access to

the people and populations being studied. The organisations and people that I collaborate with share my aims and interests. Crucially, without a collaborative approach many research questions would remain unanswered.

Why has Hong Kong achieved such high health indices? As the population ages, how can the country work to make sure care is directed to those who need it the most?

An important component is the development of a low cost, or free, health service system. A major reason for long life expectancies is a very low infant mortality rate, good preventive care and access to the latest medical drugs and technologies.

As the population ages, the problems we face are linked to the emergence of elderly people with many diseases and increased frailty and disability, who are flooding the hospitals and clinics. It is essential that we have a system that does not just concentrate on single diseases but also takes into account functional, social, nutritional and psychological factors. It is important to move beyond episodic care in hospitals to ensure that there is continuing care in the community. In the absence of such a system, those who most need the care will be neglected.



Ageing well

In an ageing world, the **Cadenza Project** in Hong Kong is revolutionising attitudes towards old age while working to promote the wellbeing of the elderly through a number of pioneering initiatives

IT IS WELL established that the global population is ageing rapidly. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that between 2000 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over the age of 60 will double from 11 to 22 per cent. While this is reflective of improved global health and in many ways constitutes a cause for celebration, this worldwide transformation also presents an array of new challenges.

In order to have an informed debate on ageing, there is a need for additional data from more countries. It is vital to understand which factors result in unimpaired ageing so that robust policies and practices can be implemented that contribute to enhancing the health and happiness of the elderly.

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL LEGACY

With a booming elderly population, Hong Kong is no exception to this global trend, but fortunately measures are being implemented to deal with this phenomenon. The Cadenza Project is a pioneering initiative that aims to promote the wellbeing of older people in the area. Launched by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust in the second half of 2006, the project aims to change the way society views its elders, improve existing services and facilities for the elderly, and move beyond the excessive reliance on a purely medical model of care. It focuses on providing education and training about age-related issues, running community demonstration projects and developing research, in partnership with The Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong University.

Cadenza's success is reflected in the positive outcomes of its activities, which have influenced both policy and practice for the improved quality of life enjoyed by the elderly in Hong Kong. One notable achievement is the proposed establishment of a multidisciplinary Institute of Ageing, led by the Vice Chancellor of The Chinese University. It is envisaged that the Institute will work in partnership with other academic institutions and charities with the aim of building on the successes of the Cadenza Project and furthering activities that contribute to creating age-friendly districts.

In addition, the Cadenza Hub offers an innovative approach to providing primary care for older people. Focusing on preventing both cognitive and physical decline, the Hub integrates both health and social care, and Western and Chinese medical concepts. It is also unique in that it aims to be self-financing – independent of government funding. This model has been adapted by Hong Kong's Hospital Authority and Housing Authority, and has received support from the Hong Kong Government Social Welfare Department in the form of rent subsidies. Presentations about the model at various international meetings have garnered widespread interest from governmental and academic visitors from all over the world.

AN EXEMPLARY CAREER

Professor Jean Woo is Director of the Cadenza Project. With research interests ranging from chronic diseases affecting the elderly to their quality of life and nutrition epidemiology,

Woo has made great strides in understanding gerontology and has had over 650 articles published in peer-reviewed indexed journals.

Woo is also the Founder and Director of two revolutionary centres: the Centre for Nutritional Studies and the SH Ho Centre for Gerontology and Geriatrics. Founded in 1997 and 1998 respectively, both are based in the Faculty of Medicine at The Chinese University of Hong Kong and represent a broad group of academics from different departments with common research interests. Woo's role involves staff recruitment, staff development, implementing research programmes and coordinating the various activities.

BEYOND A MEDICAL MODEL

Understanding what it means to age well requires the identification and analysis of a number of different factors. Help Age International compiled a Global Age Watch Index in 2013 that used a composite of four factors – income security; health status; employment and education; and enabling environment – to make possible international comparisons of quality of life for the elderly. One major aim of Woo's research is to promote this multidisciplinary and holistic approach to understanding and achieving the goal of ageing well.

The different factors affecting the process of ageing can be split into two broad categories: personal (including health and lifestyle components) and living environment (encompassing both physical and social issues).

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Yet research into ageing has generally been lacking these elements, and is instead largely medical: "The traditional approach to ageing follows a predominantly biomedical model with an emphasis on diseases of individual organs, new technology (investigations, drugs, procedures) and paternalistic strategies," Woo states. "There is generally little emphasis placed on needs – whether medical, social or psychological – from the perspective of patients."

The Cadenza Project has sought to redress this imbalance by focusing on the promotion of integrated social and health services at a primary care level for the elderly and the development of community-based models to meet unmet needs for current service models. The Cherish Our Life programme is one such model that aims to enhance the psychological wellbeing of the elderly by implementing basic screening for depression followed by referrals to the relevant mental health specialists if required. There is also a strong emphasis on teaching self-help skills, which has proved to be highly effective in combating the widespread problem of depression among older people in Hong Kong.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Education about the ageing process is a fundamental part of the Cadenza project. A five-year Cadenza training programme was successfully completed at the end of 2013. Aimed at members of the public and relevant service providers and caregivers, the range of training materials included public seminars, informal workshops and self-directed online courses. One of the main aims of Cadenza's public education campaign was to promote a positive community attitude towards older people. This drive has ranged from fun events

– such as one of Hong Kong's TV stations producing a series of docudramas where popular film stars were enlisted to highlight ageing issues – to practical projects, such as the creation and circulation of a manual containing material about maintaining and promoting good health in older adults.

The elderly people themselves have also been targeted with educational outreach projects. One major initiative has been the application of the lifestyle modification model: "The crucial thing is regular contact with a nutritionist or exercise instructor, using a sympathetic and supportive problem-solving approach rather than a negative, judgemental one," explains Woo. "A participatory approach is key; for example, supermarket tours and healthy cooking classes are very popular and can be a means of changing behaviour."

In the digital age, technology also has an important role to play in educating the elderly about a healthy lifestyle. The team designed a wellness tracker app, which allows users to input what they have eaten and the physical activities that they have undertaken so that they can understand their caloric balance.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Thanks to the efforts of the Cadenza Project, ageing issues are receiving attention at the very highest levels of society in Hong Kong. The Cadenza Fellowship Programme has galvanised increased academic interest in age-related issues and led to the implementation and funding of further research projects that continue to shed new light on population ageing.

The concept of 'ageing well' has repercussions across the world, as populations everywhere are getting older. While the Cadenza project has made impressive contributions to understanding and promoting the wellbeing of the elderly in Hong Kong, it also highlights the global need for further interdisciplinary research and funding support in the area of gerontology.

INTELLIGENCE

RELATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GEOGRAPHIC, SOCIOECONOMIC AND LIFESTYLE FACTORS TO QUALITY OF LIFE, FRAILTY AND MORTALITY IN ELDERLY POPULATIONS

OBJECTIVES

To examine personal and environmental factors that impact on successful ageing and develop strategies to provide better care for elderly populations in Hong Kong.

KEY COLLABORATORS

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PROFESSOR JEAN WOO graduated from Cambridge University in 1974. After medical posts in the Charing Cross, Hammersmith, and Brompton Hospitals, she worked in part-time posts in general practice as well as research at the University of Hong Kong. She joined the Department of Medicine at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1985 as lecturer responsible for the development of teaching and service in Geriatric Medicine, becoming Head of Department from 1993-99, Chief of Service of the Medicine and Geriatric Unit at Shatin Hospital from 1993 to 2012, and Chair Professor of Medicine in 1994. From 2000-6 she was Head of the Department of Community and Family Medicine, and from 2001-5 Director of the newly established School of Public Health. Currently she heads the Department of Medicine and Therapeutics, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, is Honorary Consultant of the Prince of Wales and Shatin Hospitals, Hospital Authority; and Honorary Professor, Faculty of Social Science, Hong Kong University. Her research interests include chronic diseases affecting elderly people, health services research, nutrition epidemiology and quality of life issues at the end of life, and has over 650 articles in peer-reviewed indexed journals.