Caring for older adults: A complex of challenges

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Heterogeneous

No two systems age at the same rate. There is no single, simple pattern to human aging.
Baby Boomers

- Likely to practice prevention
  - Mammograms, flu & shingles vaccine
- Health information savvy
  - Know little about aging or HIV
- Often demanding - Expect options
- Usually candid about illnesses
- Generally dentate
85+ years

- Lived through the Depression
  - Depression not in vocabulary

- Not comfortable talking health
  - don’t feel at risk for HIV
  - “the big C”

- No regular preventive strategies
  - Pain = reason for care?

- Diverse oral conditions
  - Some lost teeth early in life

What makes elders different?

- Physiologic changes
- Disease presents differently
- Higher risk for pathology & chronic inflammation
- Cognitive changes
  - Individual and caregiver
- Self preservation – or not...
- Perspective of health care providers
Slow Loss of Physiologic Reserve

- Immunocompetence declines
  - Slower to respond
  - Slower to heal
  - MORE vulnerable

- Progressive decline in homeostatic control
  - Less ability to respond to stress

- Body reserves decrease
  - Vessel elasticity - blood pressure higher
  - Baroreceptors - slow to adjust to position changes

Their ‘get up and go’ declines, as does their response to disease and pathology.