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The Future of the Life Cycle | Designing the Future

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Greater longevity and diversifying household makeup meet initiatives that could spur well-being across demographics

DATA-DRIVEN WELLNESS

The average American life cycle has changed dramatically in recent decades–people are marrying later, waiting to have children, and living longer. This presents interesting challenges to health-care professionals—how can medical practice keep up and help people live healthfully throughout every stage of their lives? Frank Maletz, an orthopedic surgeon in New London, CT, established the Healthspital foundation, which explores ways to overhaul health care in America.

Healthspital's key approach is to mine the abundant medical data that already exists—electronic patient records, medical research—for intelligence that health-care providers and patients can access. This would mean integrating data from many different resources, including hospital libraries and the Internet, and filtering it so that individuals can find what they need. The thousands of community hospitals across the nation, Maletz posits, could create an integrated, open "health-care ecosystem."In the Healthspital, says Maletz, "the medical librarian can be a navigator of health information, serving as a "resource center" for patients. "Patients actually help themselves with that vital intelligence—they can ask better questions and interact with their doctor," he explains. This interconnectivity would also enable health-care providers to learn more about best practices and medical trends.

Health-care practitioners can be resistant to change, but Maletz has been persistent in getting the word out about his Healthspital paradigm. We have to "accept that change is going to happen," he says, "and then use all of the tools that are available to make the system work for us."—Jennifer A. Dixon
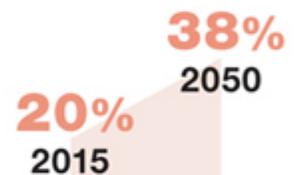

BOOMING SENIORS

52% Number of Americans over 65 by 2045

SOURCE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ELDER CARE

Older dependents (rather than children) are expected to double

38% 2050

20% 2015

SOURCE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

OLDER MOTHERS, MORE SINGLES

Median age for American motherhood for women by education level, as of 2012

28 Bachelor's degree | **25** Some college | **24** High school or less

Never-married Americans 25 and older rose in 2012

17% Women | **23%** Men

SOURCE PEW RESEARCH

Creative Collaboration

Americans' golden years today look quite different from a few decades ago. As seniors lead longer and more active lives, libraries must shift programming to meet new needs and interests. To that end, Lifetime Arts, a nonprofit arts service organization that focuses on older adults, has partnered with more than 20 library systems to design and implement innovative programs for aging populations. This initiative started in Westchester County, NY, about eight years ago and has spread nationwide.

According to **Maura O'Malley,** cofounder and CEO of Lifetime Arts, "Traditionally, library programming for older adults has been focused on the problems of old age, not so much the benefits and assets and opportunities." The goal of Creative Aging is to address changing demographics and help libraries build the capacity to collaborate with local arts educators on arts programming for older adults. Lifetime Arts provides training for library staff and an online tool kit of resources. The resulting programming can be quite diverse, shaped by the interests of the local population. It embraces everything "from tango to digital memoirs to collage and painting to graphic novels and theater," says O'Malley. The eight- to ten-week workshops typically offer a culminating event to celebrate participants' work.

According to Susan Benson, program specialist at California's Sacramento Public Library, Creative Aging classes "provide opportunities for meaningful creative expression through visual arts plus fills the need for social engagement." Social connections made through the program combat the isolation that can impact older adults and alter the "extremely limiting and erroneous" view that we lose the capacity to produce art and learn as we age.**—JAD**

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