



Christian Friends of Rambam Newsletter

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DID YOU KNOW?

- Average age of Israeli women: 84 years
- Average age of Israeli men: 80.2 years.
- The average life expectancy of Israelis is the 3rd highest in the world!

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80 is the New 60

Worldwide, including in Israel, people are living longer. The news is full of reports warning that aging people will cause a huge financial drain to healthcare systems in the future. However, these reports present only part of the picture. Contrary to popular belief, today's aging population is relatively healthy.

There are two aspects to aging: Chronological age and biological age. Chronological age

represents the number of years that a person has lived, whereas biological age is a marker of function. With today's healthier lifestyles, preventive health care, and advanced medical treatments, the biological age of many elderly people is much less than their actual chronological age. For many, 80 is the new 60!

Today's seniors are not limited by age; they are healthier and busier than their peers 10-20

years ago. Whether it is swimming, power walking, extreme sports, or Facebook—older people are far more active and busy.

This newsletter is dedicated to one of the largest groups of people worldwide—the golden agers who have paved the way before us.



Rambam's Golden Age Program

Although people are living longer, some older people are spending more time in hospitals. Rambam Health Care campus is well aware of this statistic: over the past 5 years Rambam has seen a 21% increase of emergency room (ER) visits, an 18% increase in hospitalizations, and a 17% increase of clinic visits in people ages 80 and above.

Rambam's geriatric unit offers consultation services for all older hospitalized patients. However the hospital director, Professor Rafi Beyar, felt this was not enough. To provide a higher quality of care for older people, Rambam has adopted a special care plan from the USA, the Hospital Elderly Life Program (HELP).

The program is based on a unique geriatric unit complemented by trained volunteers.

Professor Tzvi Dwolatzky, the head of geriatric services at Rambam explains, "Older people are at risk of functional deterioration while hospitalized. This program decreases the length of the older person's hospital admission, as well as the incidence of confusion, delirium, and physical deterioration often seen in acute care hospitals."

Specially trained volunteers visit older patients, helping them to get out of bed and sit up. They feed the older person, encourage him/her to drink, talk about whatever interests them, and give lots of personal attention. If possible, the volunteers also help the person to walk to maintain physical function.

To date, patients, families, and staff are happy with the results. The Golden Age Program recently received funding from a

philanthropic/governmental organization to increase its impact for elderly patients and raise hospital-wide awareness. However, additional funding is still needed to cover ongoing training and equipment costs.

Rambam also coordinates the Israel Centenarians Study together with Ben Gurion University (BGU) of the Negev, originally initiated by Professor Sara Carmel of Ben Gurion with Professor Dwolatzky under the auspices of the Center for Multidisciplinary Research in Aging at BGU. The project involves collecting data and interviewing Israeli citizens who have passed the age of 95. The initial data are revealing that people interviewed have expressed a strong will to live. Professor Dwolatzky points out, "This certainly contributes to longevity."

Technology Replaces Surgery



The Interventional Cardiology Team at Rambam Health Care Campus

A team of cardiologists at Rambam have become the first in Israel to use a new, Israeli-developed technology to repair mitral valve regurgitation, as part of a multi-national clinical trial. The implantable device was recently acquired from an Israeli start-up by a US leader in cardiology solutions. Implanted via a minimally invasive procedure, patients no longer need to undergo protracted and complex open-heart surgery.

The patient was 70 years old, suffered from a history of heart disease, and had undergone several bypass surgeries. His shortness of breath was a symptom of congestive heart failure resulting from a leaky mitral valve, a common heart condition. Until now, this condition could only be treated with open heart surgery, with its associated risks, protracted hospitalization, and recovery periods.

According to Dr. Arthur Kerner, an Attending Physician in the Interventional Cardiology Unit at Rambam and the surgeon who carried out this first procedure in Israel, there is great demand for it: "Many people suffer from this disorder, particularly in older age," he said, adding, "a solution not requiring extensive surgery is clearly preferable."

[Learn More](#)

Everyone Wants to Help

It is not always easy to watch a loved one grow older. Sometimes we want to step in and help, but meet a fiercely independent strength of will. Asking for help, in the eyes of many, is a sign of decline.

There are ways to help our aging friends and family without being intrusive. First

and foremost, patience and a listening ear is what we all need—how much more an elderly person?

When should you be concerned and encourage an elderly person to seek a medical consultation? The key word is *unusual*. Is the person *unusually* forgetful? Are they

exhibiting a completely new symptom, ache, or pain? Is there a sudden loss of appetite or change in behavior?

If you notice any of the above, encourage your loved one to seek medical advice. After all, it's always better to be safe than be sorry!



The two successfully treated patients and Dr. Yaakov Amsalem (R), Head of Interventional Neuroradiology during a treatment.
Photo Credit: Pieter Fliter

Red Carpet Treatment

In recent weeks, two extraordinary stroke cases were successfully treated at Rambam Health Care Campus, thanks to a unique, time-saving "Red Carpet Treatment."

The first patient, a 93-year-old woman, made history as the oldest stroke victim in Israel to successfully undergo mechanical thrombectomy to remove a blockage in her brain. She received the fast-track Red Carpet Treatment for suspected stroke patients under the supervision of Professor Gregory Talman of the Department of Neurology

and Dr. Yaakov Amsalem, Director of the Interventional Neuroradiology Unit. One day after surgery she was laughing with her family.

In the second case, a 67-year-old Gazan woman was at Rambam visiting her grandson when she suffered a stroke. The boy called for help and she was rushed to the emergency department. For her too, a mechanical thrombectomy was considered the best approach.

"The patient was lucky to be here when she had the

stroke," said Dr. Amsalem. "Time is critical, and the treatment she needed just happened to be available."

Mechanical thrombectomy is a complex and delicate procedure. It is available in only six hospitals in Israel—Rambam is one of them. The procedure is yet another example of how state-of-the-art interventional approaches are transforming the standard of health care and saving precious lives.

[Learn More](#)

Respecting Our Elders

We learn from and of course, respect our elders. Is there a limitation on what we can learn from them? In the field of medicine, many treatment protocols have been improved upon over successive generations. The Rambam, Maimonides, wrote explicitly on the importance of standing for an elder. Translated into today's customs, that might include getting up on a moving bus or train and offering a seat to the older person. Standing for an elder has concrete and metaphorical implications. Medicine is learned from our elders, and the Hippocratic Oath includes the promise to consider our teachers to be as dear as our own parents.

Respect for our elders, however, must not cloud our medical thinking and practice. In 2011, Kottek pointed out in Rambam Maimonides Medical Journal that a critical

statement of Maimonides reads, "One should never say: "This disease is similar to that [other] one." ... Nor should one say: "I have seen how my elders have treated [this disease] in such or such way." [As a matter of fact] a physician does not treat a disease, he rather treats a sick person."*

Kotteck then states, "To which he [Maimonides] adds: "Every person who falls ill necessarily requires renewed consideration and reflection." Maimonides thus indicates that the constitution and the psychology of the patient must be taken into account... In other words, an accomplished physician should know how to adapt his way of addressing the patient according to the latter's psychology." (Rambam Maimonides Med J 2011;2(4):e0060)

Physicians today emphasize evidence-based medicine. If our elders

treated someone with a similar condition one way, we still must consider the patient carefully and not treat only the disease. Focusing on the individual patient personalizes our care. Respect for our elders is a way of life, but respect for them involves far more than just copying and pasting what they said or did into a given situation. Rather, it is the recognition that we are standing on their shoulders, building on what they have built.

*Maimonides M. In: The Book on Asthma. Muntner S, editor. Jerusalem: Rubin Mass; 1940. p. 41.



Moses Maimonides, also known as Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (the Rambam)

Professor Jesse Lachter
Head, Endoscopic Ultrasound
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*Language,
Culture,
and
Rambam*

Zaken (זָקֵן): Old and Wise

The Hebrew noun for an old person is *zaken* (זָקֵן). In a world sensitive to stereotypes and possibly insulting labels, we are often careful in how we refer to our elders. We may use special terms such as 'the Golden Years,' those of 'advanced age,' or 'Seniors.' But how do Jewish sources refer to older people?

The word *zaken* appears in the Bible quite some time after the Creation, even though those first generations achieved quite long lives. The record holder for longevity, Methuselah, lived 969 years (Genesis 5:27).

The first time the scriptures refer to a *zaken* is with regard to Abraham. "And Abraham was old (*zaken*), well on in years, and God blessed Abraham with everything" (Genesis 24:1). In spite of acquiring the title of *zaken* and reaching the advanced age of 99

years, he had been given the promise that his wife Sarah would give birth to a child, Isaac. At 90, Sarah, is physiological beyond her childbearing age, laughs to herself, and calls her husband old (*zaken*). Of note is that in spite of his old age, there is no mention of Abraham suffering illness or disability.

The first mention of disability in old age is in Genesis 27:1, "When Isaac became old (*zaken*) his eyes dimmed from seeing." In contrast, Moses, who is told that his mission has ended and that he must hand over leadership of the nation to Joshua, departs this world at the age of 120 still robust in function "his eye had not dimmed, and his vigor had not diminished" (Deuteronomy 34:7). Generations later, the Prophet Samuel, only 52 years of age, turns to the people after appointing a king

and says in despair "As for me, I am old and gray" (I Samuel 12:2). The scriptures thus give us a clear insight into the relative difference between chronological age and biological age based on functional ability.

The Talmud beautifully summarizes the Jewish approach to defining the word *zaken* based on an acronym. "Who is the 'zaken'? He who has achieved wisdom" (Kiddushim 32). Thus the word *zaken* refers to the wise person, the sage, the esteemed person with knowledge and life experience. Modern society should adopt this attitude in relating to its older citizens. A society that gives reverence to the *zaken* is a society that honors and respects all its citizens.

Professor Tzvi Dwolatzky
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Creating the future of medicine.

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You Can Help Urgent Needs for 2016

The generosity of others is helping us replace old equipment, build new facilities, perform research, and care for our patients. Every gift counts. Click on the links below for more information on how you can help support the people of Israel via Rambam Health Care Campus.

Pray for Us and Tell Others About Us: Visit our [Christian Friends of Rambam Facebook page](#) often for prayer requests and regular updates about what is happening at Rambam.

Friends Organizations: Tax-deductible donations can be made via a Friends organization near you (listed above).

Giving: Please [visit our webpage](#) for more information about how you can make a difference in the lives of the people served by Rambam Health Care Campus.

A great way to start the New Year is to honor those who have helped pave the way before us. There are many ways you can donate for the benefit of older people being cared for at Rambam Health Care Campus.

A donation designated for Rambam's HELP program for the Geriatric Services will help assure this program continues to benefit our older patients.

Another way to help older patients is by helping to support the new Joseph Fishman Oncology Center. Last year, 52% of Rambam's cancer patients were over the age of 65. This means that some of the main beneficiaries of our new

cancer facility are older people! The Joseph Fishman Oncology Center is scheduled to open in 2016, pending donations to cover critically needed equipment and to complete construction of the interior floors. Completion of this facility is critical, so that we can provide our cancer patients with the quality of treatment they deserve in a comfortable and empathetic environment.

Thank you in advance for your prayers and support of these important projects benefitting our older patients.

May you have a blessed, healthy, and happy New Year!

I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.

Psalm 37:25 (NKJV)