

Geriatrics Consulting Services of Greensboro, P.A.

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CONVERSATIONS WITH “SILVER DOC”

Issue #1: Who’s Getting Old? Certainly Not ME!

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Crows’ feet? Roots need color again? Same old mole? A new zit? *Do you see your mother? Your grandmother?* How do you compare to 2, 5 or even 10 years ago? Gained or lost a few pounds? Cheek bones more prominent? Neck getting scrawny or do you have an extra chin?

Today, there is a negative connotation to being “old”, and being “aged” clearly is not a compliment unless we are referring to wine or cheese. Yet, our perception changes with the years. Remember when we were children and 16 seemed so old, and 31 seemed ancient? On some days, we may even feel “old” as our bodies or minds seem to betray us.

We are all aging, which is to say that we are getting older, whether we are 22, 46, 75, or somewhere in between. Even as children we were aging, but at that time it was thought of as “maturing”. Generally speaking, it is not the number of years that causes us the most problems, but getting sick. There are changes that occur in our bodies quite normally as we age and mature, some of which we see in the mirror, and others that proceed unseen.

I am a geriatrician -- a medical doctor who specializes in the care of seniors. My profession requires that I identify and appreciate the differences between normal aging and disease. Oftentimes, I am referred to as a gerontologist, which is correct in the sense that I, too, am trained in the study of aging -- but I am also a physician. As a

trained internal medicine and geriatric medicine specialist, I work with seniors and their families around issues of health and disease to preserve functional independence and quality of life even in the face of physical and mental frailty.

My medical training and experience permit me not only to understand differences between normal aging and disease, but also, to make diagnoses, evaluate the pros and cons of various tests and treatments, and assist patients and families to make decisions about their health to optimize how they feel and function. Granted, I cannot always *cure* the illnesses that afflict my patients, but I can always educate and provide care and *caring* to make life safer, more comfortable, and more dignified.

I am also a woman, a member of the sandwich generation, whose experiences as a wife, mother, daughter, and granddaughter also impact on my perceptions of health and aging, both personally and professionally. Not too many years ago, I found myself in an airport pushing both my mother in a wheelchair and my daughter in a stroller, as passersby nodded in amusement and empathy. The image is one that strikes at the experiences of many of us, I am certain, who are also struggling with their personal “stuffed sandwiches”. We all have days when we feel almost like chopped liver, do we not?

This column will explore issues of health and aging pertaining to people of all ages, focusing on normal changes, preservation of function, and knowing when to pursue assistance for ourselves and the others in our lives. Next issue will focus on memory, memory loss and dementia. I look forward to your comments, questions and any suggestions you have for future topics.

Silver Doc

August 2003
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