

## Professional Resources

### Article

#### Baby Boomers Turning 65; What Does It Mean for Us?

From [the University at Buffalo](#)

Released: 2/24/2011 1:30 PM EST

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- As of Jan. 1, the first baby boomers turned 65. What can American society expect as boomers retire, age and continue to be active? How will this affect the stigma of growing old?

As the birthday celebrations commence, University at Buffalo faculty experts are available to comment on tips and trends related to aging in America. Topic areas include elder law, geriatric medicine, hearing loss, mental health, television viewing and designs for living.

The thoughts of the UB faculty members are summarized below. For more information or to search the UB Faculty Experts blog, go to the Newstips website.

#### Will hearing aids become a fashion statement? Rock music takes its toll

Richard Salvi, PhD, UB professor of communicative disorder and sciences, otolaryngology and neurology and director of the UB Center for Hearing and Deafness, is an expert in deafness and hearing loss.

According to Salvi, "baby boomers now have reached an age where hearing loss and tinnitus become major health problems. Many have already lost much of their hearing and developed tinnitus (ringing in the ear) due to many years of listening to loud rock music.

"Hearing aids, not yet considered a fashion statement, will by necessity become a necessary part of the boomers dress code as the prevalence of age-related hearing loss begins to accelerate beyond age 65. While hearing aid technology and miniaturization have steadily advanced, restoring the hearing of our youth remains a formidable challenge," he says.

"Hearing health care costs are skyrocketing due to noise exposure and aging. The Veterans Administration ranks hearing loss as one of its Top 5 major disabilities. In 2010, the Veterans Administration paid out more than \$1 billion for tinnitus disability claims alone. The trends in the VA are a reflection of those in the general population."



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#### ***Building bridges of understanding and common interest among members***

*"Diversity is more than simply demographics. It's also about the perspectives we each bring to the table through our unique experiences. Any truly successful organization values diversity, promotes inclusiveness and appreciates the benefits diversity brings to strengthening a community."*

*Harry P. Trueheart  
Chairman, Nixon Peabody LLP*



Severe to profound hearing loss and tinnitus associated with aging and noise exposure are not just hearing problems; they can lead to social isolation, anxiety and depression contributing to an overall decline in one's general health, Salvi says.

#### **Near-death continues to be a reality on TV**

Today's television lineup includes many reality shows about ESP, "true-ghost" stories and the wonder of near-death experiences. Are they aimed at the elderly? Pop culture expert Elayne Rapping, PhD, professor emerita of American studies, says that whether they are aimed at the elderly or not, her hunch is that's who is watching them. "After all," she says, "TV supports wishful thinking and shows that entertain the connection between the here and the hereafter may be more enticing to an aging population than to those who don't plan on leaving the earthly plane anytime soon."

#### **Aging-in-place may replace nursing homes in the future**

Anthony H. Szczygiel, a professor in the UB Law School, has extensive experience lecturing, studying and actively taking on cases of elder law and says the elderly and near elderly are demanding changes in how society, governments and the courts deal with aging-related chronic care.

"Traditional nursing home stays are being replaced with new ways of dealing with chronic needs, such as the Greenhouse Project for rethinking nursing home facilities and care and the aging-in-place Village movement," says Szczygiel. "A new example of this Village movement approach to elder care, Canopy of Neighbors, will open soon to serve the aging in one Buffalo neighborhood," he says.

Szczygiel notes that in the legal arena, two recent federal court decisions give support to nursing home residents and their families challenging the warehousing of chronically ill elders, where the resident may benefit from continued physical or occupational therapy. "Too often the nursing home staff gives up on the patient and stops providing such therapy," he says.

"The cases provide a way to reverse the unintended negative consequences of Medicare's nursing home and home care coverage standards."

Szczygiel also is knowledgeable of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which provides significant support to research and demonstration projects aimed at better handling chronic health care problems.

#### **Stress and the sandwich generation**

Scott T. Meier, professor and chair of the UB Department Counseling, School and Educational Psychology in the Graduate School of Education, is an expert in counseling and psychotherapy.

"Traditionally, the elderly have been less interested in

mental health services than younger people,” states Meier. “However, that may partially be a generational effect in that people who came of age in the 1960s and later are more accustomed to the idea of using counseling and psychotherapy for personal, vocational and family problems. Consequently, we may see the average age of individuals in counseling and psychotherapy increase over the next two decades.

“One of the issues that may cause stress for boomers is that they are more likely to have to take care of elderly parents (who are living longer) as well as their own children (who may have more trouble getting employed and established in careers and families).”

#### **Old doesn't have to mean sick**

Robert S. Stall, MD, is a UB clinical assistant professor in medicine and a specialist in geriatrics.

Stall says boomers should avoid self-prejudice (“Doctor, I'm not getting any younger!”) and ignore ageist comments from friends, family, even health professionals (“What do you expect at your age?”). Aging boomers have a lot to expect in terms of health and well-being, Stall says. “You should tend to both the diseases and the dis-eases (such as pain, depression, social isolation, functional problems) that are more common as you age but not due to age, in and of itself.

“Everyone knows a 95 year old who looks and acts 75, and the 65 year old who appears to be 80. And anyone who thinks the pain in their right knee is solely age-related needs to wonder how their same-aged left knee can be pain-free.”

Stall says it's important to remember that “gradual decline may not be Alzheimer's disease, ageist attitudes are harmful and there is always something that can be done to help” as we age.

#### **Design that ages with you**

Edward Steinfeld, adjunct professor of architecture and director of UB's Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA), is an expert on issues of accessibility. He believes that products and services that benefit elders do not have to be stigmatizing or isolating.

“If we don't take steps to plan our communities and homes for aging populations, older people will be isolated and their quality of life will suffer,” Steinfeld says.

“Communities that feel an obligation to respond to the needs of their elder residents will proceed with specialized services like expensive paratransit, more publicly assisted housing and services like Meals on Wheels. This will increase the tax burden.”

The solution to this problem, according to Steinfeld, is universal design, design for improving usability and social engagement in response to the diversity of the population. “Universal design applies to services as well as products,” he explains. “I like to describe the key benefits of universal

design by the stages of the lifespan: safety and security for children, independence and social responsibility for young adults, reducing stress for working-age adults and maintaining independence and social engagement for elders.

“Together with our partners, we founded an organization called the Global Universal Design Commission, which I think will soon take a leadership role in changing current attitudes in the business world. The commission already has members like AARP, Disney and Proctor and Gamble, which see the value of this idea. In a few years, universal design will be as well known as sustainability is today.”

“The smart sectors of the business community, including builders, developers, planners and manufacturers, are well aware that changing demographics will provide an opportunity as well as a challenge in the future. They have not addressed the aging population very well in the past because they often believe that environments, products and services targeted to older adults are stigmatized due to ageism, thus no one else will buy them,” he said.

“This, of course, leads to a separate market for things like age-restricted communities, mature market products and age-targeted services like home monitoring. Even older people don't like to identify as old in our society because 'ageism' is so rampant.”

The University at Buffalo is a premier research-intensive public university, a flagship institution in the State University of New York system and its largest and most comprehensive campus. UB's more than 28,000 students pursue their academic interests through more than 300 undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs. Founded in 1846, the University at Buffalo is a member of the Association of American Universities.

2011

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