

# Vulnerability and loneliness at the end of life

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## Summary

There is no doubt that the beginning and the end of life are periods in which a person manifests itself as that which needs the Community and its help. The aging population presents enormous opportunities for the nations, but also enormous challenges. A 10 % of the world population is over 60 years. Health is not anymore only personal matter. It became a public thing concerning to every member of society. Sharing responsibility in protection of health is sharing of basic goods for the reason of awareness and dependency. No one could be completely independent concerning to health issues nowadays. Closer we are to death, the stronger dependency is presented in our life. Even in the present times is health care presented as Christian vocation especially at the time of the meeting with the Creator.

Vulnerable people are people who not by their fault are in difficult life situations. Old and dying people are definitely vulnerable.

Loneliness is a complex and usually unpleasant emotional response to isolation or lack of companionship. Loneliness typically includes anxious feelings about a lack of connectedness or communality with other beings, both in the present and extending into the future.

Key words: Vulnerability, Loneliness, End of Life, Family Care, Health Care

## 1. Lead -in

Man is experiencing in his life different periods. Once he feels strong, self-sufficient and almost indestructible, other times feels weak, lonely and still

dependent on the assistance of others. There is no doubt that the beginning and the end of life are periods in which a person manifests itself as that which needs the Community and its help. Dependence on the community at large is to show humanity and faith.

Change in health status, loss of health, and ultimately dying is a reality that directly affects both individuals and the entire community. Health is not anymore only personal matter. It became a public thing concerning to every member of society. All societies are creating social

organisations of health care. At one hand responsibility of society and responsibility of person are put together to reach same goal – well-being of person. At another hand well-being of individuals is base for well-being and social peace in society. Sharing responsibility in protection of health is sharing of basic goods for the reason of awareness and dependency. No one could be completely independent concerning to health issues nowadays. Health care system is depending of huge income for research, tools, medications and specialist. No one is in condition be ready to pay for everything. For that reason were created different policy supporting health care systems in different countries.

Health became subject of culture, but also subject of tough business. More is written and said about health, more people are in situation struggling to protect it. Even though the knowledge and consciousness about health issues is permanently increasing, some people have less and less means to keep good and healthy living conditions. The reason, why health is becoming more and more luxury because „ Health is not a sensible good: feeling well or being pain free.

[...] Human well-being includes intellectual knowledge, acquired skills, moral virtues, harmonious relationships, and God's supernatural gifts – none of which pertains to health“ (GRISEZ, G. 1999). World Health Organization characterized health not only as absence of the illness in the body, but rather as well-being of the human entity with its social, cultural and spiritual background.

## **2. The aging population is a challenge**

Based on estimates and reports of the Population Division of the United Nations, population aging is a global, deep and lasting phenomenon, with important ramifications and implications for all facets of human life, in the economic, social, political, etc. Worldwide, the elderly population increase by 2 % per year, considerably faster than the total population. This presents

enormous opportunities for the nations, but also enormous challenges. A 10 % of the world population is over 60 years. Overcome period of time where economic and social benefits for our elderly people took priority, we are now in the age of technical improvements addressed to avoid independence, mobility and communication barriers, by the elderly and disabled.

Main goals of the policy are:

- To guarantee quality of health care system – by checking the quality of establishments and professionals. In Slovakia similarly as in another countries it is done by accreditation of the hospitals. If hospital is not capable to provide high-quality health care, is closed. It doesn't mean that all hospitals are at the same level. Different levels are as a result in specializations and needs in society. For example in Slovakia are only 4 hospitals appointed to be transplantation center. In the country of roughly 5.4 million inhabitants it is enough. They are in different regions to ensure good and quick access for patients.
- To ensure professionalism - by creating a good condition for education and skill. All professionalists must pass heavy educational and skill training. Even after obtaining of diploma they are enrolled into permanent educational process in the hospitals, at conferences act.
- To create legal background for health care workers. Working with the human beings is acquiring existence of good and just order. Law should always protect the patients, but also health care workers. To work at the health care system is often to work at the brink of law. Good Professional in health care should always ask himself what is legal and what is illegal.
- To warrant access for all members of the society. I already said that expenses in health care system are enormous. But life and health is something, what no one can bail out. Hospitals and health care establishments should be in accessible distance for everybody.
- To assure equality in approach toward all patients. We, human beings, are equal to each other. Equality is based on human dignity and sanctity of human life. No one has more rights or should be preferred to others. If it is necessary same or similar health care should be delivered to everyone. There is no right to have better medication only for prominent patients. Equality is not excluding possibility to pay for extra standard and services. Especially in private institutions services above standard should be paid.
- To guarantee respect for human dignity and sanctity of life. The main duty health care worker is saving life, protection of health or improvement if health is damaged. Worker should never act against life and health. Res-

pect and high esteem toward patient and reverence toward human life are foundation of good health care system.

The biggest change is related to the Christianity. Charity became the way to perfection. People were encouraged help to the ill and care for elders.

Two sources of encouragement:

- Obligation of care for own life and health. Sanctity of life in Christianity pushed people to protect themselves from dangers and harm. As God's creation human being was presented as called to perfection of life. Only one spot was there in medieval history – self-hurt during the penitence.
- Christian commitment to help others. Duty to help and share all goods was essential to the first Christians and stayed with Christianity until nowadays. In middle age were created numerous shelters and refuges. In the time of plagues and cholera it was religious orders and volunteers who took care of ill. Many of them put their life as sacrifice helping to the dying. Health care was presented as Christian vocation.

Even in the present times is health care presented as Christian vocation. In the beatitudes is written „Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.“ To help people in need is to practice merciful love to the neighbor. Taking care for ill has eschatological meaning. In the Gospel according to Mathew is written: „Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.“ The best explanation who is our neighbor is in the Gospel – in the story about Good Samaritain. Every human being is our neighbors and we have duty to help anytime we see somebody needs our help. „Some moral responsibilities regarding health care are independent of one's personal vocation. [...] In health care as in everything else one must be fair to everyone concerned, and one may never do anything wrong on some other ground for the sake of health.“

Vulnerable people are people who not by their fault are in difficult life situations. Old and dying people are definitely vulnerable.

### 3. Loneliness

Loneliness is a complex and usually unpleasant emotional response to isolation or lack of companionship. Loneliness typically includes anxious feelings about a lack of connectedness or communality with other beings, both in the present and extending into the future.

WHO did a worldwide survey in 33 world cities. In all of world culture the responses of the responders incredibly met in point: the desire of seniors everywhere in the world is to survive old age close to family and friends. This does not mean in one apartment, but to have contact with them and when they want can come to visit. (Akácsová, E., Kušnierik, J. 2012)

Especially after the loss of a life partner is sense of loneliness escalating. Loneliness is a problem of modern society when the people are too busy to have time for their relatives, but worse also for themselves. Even thou we have in our houses and seniors' houses good and helpfull equipement – seniors feel more and more alone. No one machine, computer or another devices can replace human being with its feelings.

#### **4. Conclusion**

At the end we like to underline specific approach toward individual person and its needs regardless costs or problems, to understand human being as a multi-dimensional entity. It is necessary to find a sort of meta-criterion which would be a source to all the moral factors, and give them a new integration. The concept of a human person holds out much hope of meeting such requirements. Dying person is a vulnerable entity and is necessary to satisfy need to them that they can feel participation of the community. Accompany someone on the road to eternity is a manifestation of Christian love while completing vocation to follow Christ.

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