



# Ageism as a form of inequality in health

Ageism all around the older people; in the health care system, workplace, social care, habitation and media

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AGEISM "A process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashioned in morality and skills . . . .  
Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves; thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings....."

*R. Butler, Why Survive? Being Old in America, 1975 - item no. 71 of this bibliography*

Older patients are often treated by several healthcare professionals, including different prescribing physicians, which may lead to duplicate prescribing and serious problems with inappropriate prescribing. There are also inconsistencies in updates on information about indications, duration of therapy, monitoring of adverse reactions and follow-up of safety and effectiveness of medications prescribed to older patients.  
Inappropriate prescribing in older patients is understood in many studies to be the prescribing of medication that is potentially inappropriate in older age. These so-called PIMs (potentially inappropriate medications) have been identified by a consensus of expert panels as medications that carry more risks than benefits for older adults. While safer alternatives exist in the pharmaceutical market, PIMs should not be prescribed to older patients because of their higher risks of drug-therapy problems.

The suboptimal prescribing in the geriatric population use the following three categories:  
**Overprescribing or overuse** of medicines: application of higher doses of medicine than is clinically necessary; excessive or inappropriate polypharmacy; long-term use of medication without proved efficacy; use of medication in vague indications.  
**Underprescribing or underuse** of medicines: use of lower than optimal doses; not prescribing medications known to be effective and safe in geriatric patients.  
**Inappropriate prescribing:** prescribing PIMs in geriatric patients; prescribing despite known drug-drug or drug-disease interactions.  
Inappropriate medication use is a general term describing a range of problems arising from the prescription, administration, and storing of medication, as well as problems with medication nonadherence.

**In the HEALTHCARE SYSTEM Older Adults (OA's) may:**  
  
Be treated as "crocks"  
Be underdiagnosed  
Be overmedicated/undermedicated  
Be patronized  
Be automatically ordered as a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate)  
Be excluded from decisions made about their own care

**In the WORKPLACE, OA's may:**  
  
Be "downsized" first  
Be passed over for promotions/raises  
Find their suggestions/observations ignored and/or denigrated  
Find it very difficult to get a new job



**On TELEVISION, OA's:**  
  
Are largely absent from Saturday AM cartoons (unless they are witches)  
Show up primarily in ads for health-problem-oriented products  
Are depicted in stereotypical fashions

