

Preface



Kevin High, MD, MSc
Guest Editor

We are getting older; not just individually, but as a people. The increase in the percentage of the population in the oldest decades has been well documented in developed nations and is now a worldwide phenomenon. The average life expectancy is now over 80 years in some countries, and by 2020 the average “world” life expectancy is anticipated to be over 72 years. This dramatic increase in average life span is due in large measure to the conquering of infectious causes of death in childhood and early adulthood. Immunizations and sanitation/food safety efforts have undoubtedly contributed more to the increased life expectancy accomplished in the twentieth century than all other medical interventions combined. However, as we enter the twenty-first century, infectious diseases, particularly those related to HIV/AIDS, remain the most common causes of death in many parts of the developing world where life expectancy is under 50 years. No doubt there will be new and emerging challenges to meet in coming decades; pandemic influenza is but one example.

An interesting paradox of increased life expectancy is that we are now faced with a large number of older adults in whom the circle of life is evident. In this group, much like the neonate, infectious disease again becomes a severe, and common, malady. In this issue of the *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine*, authors who have focused much of their careers on the interface of aging and infectious diseases review the unique aspects of infectious diseases in older adults. Older adults experience biologic, social, and systems changes that increase their risk of infection, alter presentation of disease, complicate diagnosis and therapy, and present unique prevention and

treatment challenges. Our hope is that this series will increase awareness of the unique aspects of infection in older adults, assist clinicians with the management of these patients today, and serve as a call to action for investigators and the research enterprise to address the pressing needs of the most rapidly growing population in the developed world: adults over age 70.

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