

EDITOR'S COMMENT

The best years



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When I was a medical student we were taught what was then called geriatric medicine by Professor Meiring — a physician of the old school and a delightful person. He told us, and I believed him, that medicine for the elderly is internal medicine at its best. I have always enjoyed the elderly and found a particular pleasure in dealing with their medical problems with the extra care needed in people who have a number of co-existing pathologies. Professor Meiring was right — you have to practise with greater care and far more attention to detail when looking after someone who may be on a number of different drugs, have a number of different medical problems and possibly, more importantly, have social and economic problems that are particular to the end of life.

In putting together this edition of *CME*, Stan Lipshitz has called it 'the silver surfers'. I like to think that this is because he, like me, sees the later years as a time when people are able to indulge their greatest pleasures, unencumbered by work and the demands of a growing family. It is our responsibility as doctors to help them to enjoy those years to the full. The team who have put together the articles in this edition are obviously fully aware of this responsibility and have highlighted some of the more important aspects of medicine in the elderly. Tobie de Villiers tackles the increasingly controversial topic of hormone replacement therapy in older women and gives an excellent analysis of the recent research on the subject. Christianne Bouwens takes the mystery out of assessing an older patient with her clear explanation of geriatric assessment. Depression is a common and often missed problem in older people, ably dealt with by Dora Wynchank. Old age is a time of metabolic change and as a result endocrine disorders may manifest very differently, as explained in detail by Brynne Ascott-Evans and Tanya Kinvig. As you all know by now, exercise is a particular passion of mine, so I am very pleased to see that Solange Czerniewicz and Claire Nicholson have included an article on this important part of management. Bernard Levinson shows that he has the sensitivity to deal with changing sexuality in the elderly and hopefully his approach will help others do the same. An approach to sleep disorders by Dr Rosman, often highly distressing, completes this excellent issue.

Elsewhere, November and December are the months in which we tend to focus on HIV and AIDS and I have outlined the Tshepang initiative which can give everyone of you the opportunity to treat non-medical aid patients with this disease. I hope many people sign up after seeing how easy it is to participate.

It just remains for myself and my team to wish all our readers and their families a good holiday season and everything of the best for 2005. My greatest hope is that we may start to see the end of the conflict that has characterised the years since 11 September 2001 — perhaps I am being overly optimistic!