INSTITUTES OF PUBLIC HEALTH IMPORTANCE

NIGHTINGALES MEDICAL TRUST
- Eldercare with a difference

INTRODUCTION

Demographic transition has lead to the population ageing of India. People older than 60 years, constitutes one of the fastest-growing population segments. India has around 100 million elderly at present and the number is expected to increase to 323 million, constituting 20 per cent of the total population, by 2050.1, 2. The demographic transition and changes in society and economy are posing challenges to those concerned with their physical and emotional well-being. Elderly people need to be provided with comprehensive health care addressing physical, mental and social problems.

As per the 2011 census, 8% of India’s population is aged 60 years or older. The population figures are projected to go up to 10.7% in 2021 and 12.4% in 2026. The old age dependency ratio has been steadily rising. This enormous rise in elders population poses multiple challenges. The country is not geared up to manage such a large older population. Without adequate expansion in geriatric health care and social security measures the quality of life of the elderly, particularly of the underprivileged elders will be adversely affected.

The phenomenon of population ageing is becoming a major concern for policy makers all over the world. In India, the traditional Indian society with its concept of joint family system was instrumental in safeguarding the social and economic security of the elderly people. The changes in the social scenario, the move towards nuclear set ups are depriving the elders of family support and are exposing them to physical, emotional, financial insecurity. More and more elders are being pushed to live alone or with less security. Most of these elders, due to age related disabilities and frailty become easy target to abuse and crime. With proper awareness and timely help many crimes and abuse against the elderly could be averted.

In view of the need for intervention in the field of welfare of the aged, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India framed the National Policy for Older Persons in 1999. The policy provides broad guidelines to State Governments to take action for the welfare of elderly. The National Policy brought in a new paradigm – it views older people as active participants in an age-integrated society and as active contributors as well as beneficiaries of development. It promotes the concept of “Ageing in Place” – that the care of the senior citizen should be vested in the family and community. Institutional care should be the last resort.

The journey of Nightingales Medical Trust started around the same time as the National Policy on Older Persons was framed. At a time when policy makers were framing together the policy for older persons, Dr. Radha S. Murthy and Mr. S. Premkumar Raja got together to start an initiative to provide solutions to the problems of the elderly which were in tune with their needs. Having run a doorstep medical service successfully they came across many elderly patients who suffered from psychological and social problems rather than physical ailments. To address this problem and to make a difference in the life of the elderly, the Nightingales Medical Trust was established in 1998.

Today, Nightingales Medical Trust (NMT) has completed 16 years of dedicated service to age care. While the traditional joint family system is fast disintegrating in India, NMT is striving to keep family bonds intact through various innovative, family and community based support systems for elders of different socio-economic groups keeping in view of the physical, medical, psychological, economic and social needs. Every day, over 1000 elders benefit from the different services of Nightingales. Most of the issues facing the increasing population of elderly are effectively addressed through the following support systems:
DRIVING AWAY LONELINESS AND DEPRESSION

Nightingales Elders Enrichment and Day Care Centres: NMT runs three Enrichment Centres for the elderly from the middle income group. In support of active ageing, these Centres have facilities and services that include health care, counseling, physiotherapy, fitness programmes, yoga, total daycare, recreational, cultural activities, talks, interactive sessions, talent display, income generation, picnics, games and competitions. It has more than 300 active elderly members utilizing the facilities.

Nightingales Sandhya Kirana: This daycare facility is for economically disadvantaged elders. This joint programme of NMT and Bangalore City Corporation was started in 2004. Income generation is a special feature. Members make eco-products, jute mats, greeting cards, paper bags and envelopes. The Centre helps in marketing the products. Other services include medical care, health education, midday meals, counseling, fitness programs, recreational and cultural activities. All the services are free. More than 60 elders attend the centre regularly.

COMBATING ELDER ABUSE

Elders Helpline: Disrespect, abuse, exploitation and desertion by children and harassment in society are problems faced by many elders. To address the issue of elder abuse, NMT established the Elders Helpline in 2002 in association with the Bangalore City Police. Through this, NMT strives to ensure elders a life of dignity and security. Senior citizens in distress and in need of help call the Helpline over a toll free telephone 1090. The services are free. Services include prompt intervention in times of need, counseling, reconciliation, and rehabilitation, providing information, pension assistance, guidance on reverse mortgage, legal support and police intervention. Since inception in 2002 till end of year 2014, the helpline received 1,28,145 calls. 7810 complaints were received and 4022 complaints were resolved successfully.

ENSURING HEALTH CARE

Nightingales Centre for Ageing and Alzheimer’s: India is lagging behind in awareness about Dementia and effective care systems. In view of the need to provide comprehensive support services to elders suffering from Dementia the Nightingales Centre for Ageing and Alzheimer’s was established in 2010. This 86 bedded facility is the first of its kind in India. It engages a multi-disciplinary team to provide inpatient care, both long and short term, day care and rehabilitation for elders suffering from dementia. Public education through outreach programmes, mobile memory screening, tele-dementia care, training of caregivers and research are the other features of the Centre.

Nightingales Lifesaving Services: Started in 2000, this programme is training family members of the elderly in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) techniques and First Aid to handle emergencies with confidence. However, in view of demand, the services are now available to other individuals, service providers, institutions and corporate too.

Nightingales Dementia Day Care Centre: Started in the 2008, this centre provides day care and therapeutic services to elders suffering from dementia.

Steady Steps - Fall Prevention and Rehabilitation: Steady Steps is a programme to enable elders advance into old age with maximum mobility and fitness. Fall prevention and rehabilitation are the main components. The facilities include guided and personalized physical exercises with the aid of modern gadgets.

ETCM Nightingales Dementia Care Centre: To bring down the cost of institutional care for dementia patients and to benefit needier patients, the Trust established a 35 bed facility for dementia care at ETCM hospital at Kolar. Inaugurated May 2014, this is the first of a few proposed Satellite Dementia Care Centres to be established by using Technology and Tele-Dementia Management Solutions based on a Hub & Spokes Model with Nightingales Centre for Ageing & Alzheimer’s as the hub. Once this pilot project becomes a success, NMT plans to set up more satellite units like this in different towns and cities in India enabling affordable, accessible and efficient dementia care.

ENSURING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Government authorized ID Cards: To help elders avail various financial concessions from both government and private agencies ID cards are issued. The
Government of Karnataka has authorized NMT for this purpose since 2007.

**Nightingales Jobs 60+:** Started in Oct 2011, this project aims at providing skills training and facilitating post retirement employment opportunities to senior citizens. The needy elders are trained in computers, soft skills, tally etc. Vocational training is also provided. The project also manages a free job portal for senior citizens. Job fairs are organised for senior citizens and have received overwhelming response – indicating that post retirement work opportunities are a felt need of the elderly.

### PROMOTING ACTIVE AGEING

**Nightingales Trust Bagchi Centre for Active Ageing:** This unique project established in Oct 2014 is India’s first comprehensive active ageing facility. This Centre aims to promote social integration, healthy lifestyle, financial empowerment, happiness and dignity to the elders in a safe, friendly and fun-filled environment. This program is scientifically designed based on ThinkingFit research study carried out in UK. 60 elders attend the programme regularly.

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**Gallery 1: Snap shots of the activities of Nightingales Medical Trust**

Activities with elders at Nightingales Sandhya Kirana and Dementia Day care Centre

Elders learning computers at Nightingales Jobs 60+

Road show for Prevention of Elder Abuse

Fitness programmes and talks at Nightingales Elders Enrichment Centre
NMT Centre for Active Ageing: The response received for the active ageing programme was very encouraging. The elders have seen substantial benefits from participating in this programme. This encouraged the Trust to start the Centre for Active Ageing at Kothnur in June 2015.

PROTECTING ELDERS RIGHTS & INTERESTS

Awareness and Advocacy: Regular awareness programmes are organized every year through rallies, public hearings, interactive sessions, workshops and releasing of informative handbooks. These programmes, over the years have led to tangible benefits to senior citizens and have sensitized the general public to the problems faced by elders. Some of the issues focused so far

Gallery 2: Snap shots of the activities of Nightingales Medical Trust

Long term care for elders suffering from Alzheimer’s at Nightingales Centre for Ageing and Alzheimer’s

Nightingales Centre for Ageing and Alzheimer’s

RRTC training programmes

Fitness programmes and talks at Nightingales Elders Enrichment Centre
are elders security, bridging generation gap, finance and property planning, legal precautions, regulating old age homes, setting up of fast track courts and exclusive legislation for elderly.

**Regional Resource and Training Centre:** In recognition of our services, the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, has authorized NMT as the Regional Resource & Training Centre (RRTC) in Age Care for the four Southern States of India in March 2011. RRTC aims to build the capacity of NGOs engaged in Age Care through series of workshops, trainings and awareness programmes. Monitoring visits to NGOs supported by the Govt. of India is also a part of this project. This initiative aims to improve the quality of life of older persons to a great extent.

**CONCLUSION**

Nightingales Medical Trust hopes in future to partner with likeminded NGOs in other parts of the country to replicate its successful models. It hopes to undertake more research studies in age care with special focus on dementia and to strengthen advocacy efforts. Its ongoing facilities and services are well utilized by a growing number of older persons, and recognized by the community, social organizations and the government.

The need of the hour is a comprehensive aged care service model that meets the multiple needs of the elderly at home, in the community or in an residential facility. NMT projects have been successful in achieving this to a significant extent.

**REFERENCES**

1. Population Reference Bureau., 2012