

ATSU hosts second annual Lecture on Aging

Renowned scientist discusses health promotion, healthy aging

The United States spends 16 percent of its gross national product (GNP) on healthcare, and yet citizens of other countries live far longer than those in this country. In fact, life span in the United States normally ranks between 25 and 35, usually ranks with countries such as Cuba who have no money to spend on a high-tech healthcare infrastructure.

When John Morley, M.D., began his lecture on health promotion and healthy aging at A.T. Still University's second annual Lecture on Aging, he startled his audience with some surprising information about the United States.

"Cuba has no money, therefore they spend a lot of time with high-touch medicine," Dr. Morley said. "Medicine is divided into high technology, and we do that wonderfully in this country; however, we tend to spend all the money on high technology, not high touch," he added.

"One thing I love about osteopathic [medicine] is that you are at least theoretically a high-touch field."

One of the looming statistics in the United States is the large number of people entering retirement age and the growing lifespan of the average citizen. At the turn of the 21st Century, the life expectancy has lengthened to 80 and beyond.

Dr. Morley said that geriatrics, which an industry survey has recently shown to be the most satisfying and fulfilling medical career, has to deal with new issues that arise as older adults live longer. In the past, physicians tried to keep older people with serious diseases comfortable. The prevailing logic was that the person would probably die before the disease could kill them, and aggressive treatments may only quicken their death.

That approach is no longer appropriate, according to Dr. Morley.

"We have to learn to be much more aggressive [in treating disease] than we used to be with older people,"

Dr. Morley said. "You also need to realize that medications that may be wonderful for you when you're 30 can be terrible for you when you get older."

Older adults will become more and more interested in living independent lifestyles. Dr. Morley pointed out that osteopathic medicine, with its whole person approach that includes paying attention to the mental and spiritual wellness of a person, is uniquely qualified to supply the type of treatment that older adults need.

"The No. 1 cause of problems with old people is depression," Dr. Morley said. "We all need a hug every day. We all need to be listened to. We know that if you keep your mind active, it delays cognitive impairment. If you avoid isolation and recognize and treat depression early, it maintains vitality."

Dr. Morley also pointed out that participating in a social community, such as a local church, is extremely beneficial to older adults.

"Spirituality is key to longevity. Church attendance, which you could interpret as social support, is really important," Dr. Morley said. "For those of you who are not religious, go to church anyhow, because it's great social support."

Dr. Morley said the best thing for medical students as future doctors to remember is that they don't know everything, and listening to and respecting their patients is most important.

"When you are finished at medical school and you go out, please remember that you are 26, 27, and maybe you don't have all the answers for 85-year-olds because you read it in a textbook. We don't know why most 85-year-olds got there, and it's most probably not due to anything we tell people," Dr. Morley said.

"The single most important thing I tell [these] patients is keep doing what you are doing and remember most of your physicians will not reach your age."



Dr. John Morley was the featured speaker at the second annual Lecture on Aging. Dr. Morley said the single most important thing he tells his patients over 85 is to keep doing what they are doing.

John E. Morely, M.D.

Dr. John E. Morley is the Dammert Professor of Gerontology at St. Louis University Medical School and director of the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center at the St. Louis V.A. Medical Center. Dr. Morley was educated at the University of Witwatersrand in his native South Africa and received postgraduate training at UCLA.

Dr. Morley is board certified in endocrinology and geriatrics. He is the author of numerous papers and 14 texts, including *Geriatric Nutrition*, Second Edition (1995), *Memory Function and Aging Related Disorders* (1992), *Medical Care in the Nursing Home*, Second Edition (1996), *Frailty in Older Individuals* (1993), and *As We Age* (1996). In 1990, Dr. Morley was included among the 100 Most-Cited Scientists in the World from 1981-1988. Dr. Morley's current research topics include memory function, nutrition, and endocrinology of the elderly.