

(A list of the delegates of this section is available in the Press Room)

CONFERENCE ON AGING
August 13-15, 1950
The Shoreham Hotel
Washington, D.C.
Russell, Ex. 6300 Ext. 4625

Digest of Proceedings
Section 1a
Aging Research
Morning session, Aug. 15

Approved by Roy G. Hoskins, Chairman

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A recommendation that an Advisory Council on Gerontology be immediately established under the auspices of the Federal Security Agency was the first action of this section this morning. The council, it is proposed, would advise on the development of research and control programs on aging.

A previously appointed committee of the Section brought in a recommendation regarding public support of gerontology as follows:

1. This Conference has afforded evidence that increased research in gerontology and geriatrics would be of great benefit to the Nation.
2. The problems are such that long-term support of research widely distributed throughout the Nation is imperative.

A sub-committee was appointed to formulate the goals and principles of the Section's discussions. A series of resolutions were voted (see attachment).

Other actions of the section were:

- 1) The unanimous recommendation of the section that a Gerontological Institute be established at an appropriate time in the near future. Purpose of such an Institute would be to deal with the problems of aging on an integrated and unified basis. The proposed Institute would foster, conduct, and carry out research in all disciplines, including the social sciences. The Institute would bring all the resulting knowledge together with a view to seeking its practical application in solving the problems of aging.

- 2) Approval unanimously of a recommendation that a White House Conference on Aging, comparable to the White Conference on Children, be held every ten years.

The Section in its discussions placed heavy emphasis upon the need for both immediate and long range research. Financial backing over many years was stressed as a means for giving assurance to investigators and to provide a "backbone" for their programs.

"In the aging problem, in particular," said Dr. Hoskins, "there is the urgent need for new knowledge. Too much consideration is given to practical results without considering the basis for those results -- which, of course, is the result of long and tedious research work, often totally unrelated initially to its final application."

In detailing some of the problems of research, Dr. Nathan Shock declared there are many investigators with "good research programs on aging, planned and organized," but who cannot go into operation because they lack financial support.

The need for young investigators in the field was emphasized by Dr. Cowdry. Here again, he pointed out, lack of financial backing is discouraging many of the younger investigators so that they turn to other fields.

Research studies to isolate factors responsible for various endocrine and organic changes associated with aging would be an important step towards minimizing the effects of the wear and tear of life, said Dr. Earl T. Engle.

Specific research projects which bear investigation were mentioned. These were:

- 1) Dietary research. An example was vitamins. How much older people need has never been investigated. Most of such research, said Mr. Thomas Gardner, has been done on young and growing humans and animals.
- 2) Physical capacity. Fatigue studies, speed, strength, and agility determinations for older people bear investigation.
- 3) Retraining. What methods shall be used in retraining older people? What are the limitations of such programs?
- 4) How to facilitate personal adjustment and release potential abilities of older people. In this respect, Dr. Shock pointed out that the pattern of our society has imposed upon the average individual the need constantly to adjust to a world imposed upon him by an older generation. Older people today, however, he points out, are confronted by this problem in reverse: The need to adjust to a younger world.

Goals and Recommendations of the Section on Research and Aging

I. Gerontological research is defined as:

- a) The study of the changes that take place in organisms with the passage of time with particular reference to progressive changes of later life, and
- b) The study of the aging, of the social environment of the organisms, and of interrelationships between the aging organism and his social environment.

II. The study of gerontology (which includes geriatrics) requires the interdisciplinary approach, including all physical, biological and social sciences.

III. The effective application of current knowledge would immediately bring great advances, but the hope for the long range future must depend upon basic research in all the sciences, the practical applications of which will not always be immediately evident.

- IV. It is of utmost importance that long range investigation be got under way dealing with the changes associated with the passage of time at every level from the atomic to the social bringing all latest technics and insights from all the sciences, with special reference for instance to study in pathology, steroid chemistry, cardiovascular diseases, geriatric problems, and in the social science sphere, study of the nature of social adaptability of aging individuals.
- V. One of the major needs is a continuing survey of research results from many fields which may bear on the problems of aging although that may not have been the original goal, nor evident to the investigator.
- VI. Advancement of knowledge is to a large extent dependent upon willingness of older persons to serve as subjects in gerontological investigation. Steps should be taken to acquaint the public with this need. (A question was raised as to the phraseology of this statement.)
- VII. It is recognized that gerontology is a matter of world wide interest and this group expresses the desirability of cooperation with scientists in other countries.