

Frailty: basis, burden and challenges for public health

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The worldwide population is aging and countries are facing ongoing challenges in caring for their elderly. Multimorbidity and need for social support increase with age. Age-related conditions are a significant burden for the person, his or her family, and public health care systems. Therefore, over the past 20 years, clinicians and researchers have shown increasing interest in frailty. This has been defined to objectively describe a transitional stage between robustness and dependence and to identify a target population that would benefit from interventions to prevent loss of autonomy. Although recent research has led to a better understanding of the pathophysiology of frailty, there is no consensus regarding its operational definition, especially in the specific context of epidemiological follow-up and management of elderly nursing home residents. An interesting definition in this context could be the one that best predicts the occurrence of negative health outcomes, such as falls and death. Moreover, frailty could be avoided, delayed and sometimes cured by the implementation of targeted interventions. Several treatments seem to have a possible efficacy in the management of the components of frailty. However, there is a lack of evidence to support the effect of these preventive and therapeutic treatments. In conclusion, frailty represents a huge potential public health issue at both the patient and the societal levels because of its multiple clinical, societal consequences and its dynamic nature.