

Comment on “Older and Better: A Narrative Review of Successful Aging and Adaptation to Pain in Late Life”

To the Editor:

I read with great interest the insightful article “Older and Better: A Narrative Review of Successful Aging and Adaptation to Pain in Late Life”(1), which explores how older adults adapt to chronic pain. However, I believe it is essential to expand the conversation beyond traditional biomedical models of successful aging by integrating psychosocial components and patient perspectives into these frameworks. Further, it might also be worth considering the adoption of resilience frameworks (2).

Systematic reviews of operational definitions of successful aging from the perspective of researchers as well as older adults themselves, demonstrates the absence of a consensus on what successful aging truly entails (3-7) Many operational definitions emphasize physiological factors, while others recognize the importance of psychosocial dimensions such as life satisfaction, personal resources, and social engagement (3,4). These elements, often overlooked in biomedical models, are critical to understanding how older adults experience aging.

Moreover, lay perspectives on successful aging frequently differ from researcher-driven models, often placing a stronger emphasis on psychosocial components (5). These discrepancies highlight the need to include the voices of older adults themselves when defining successful aging, particularly in the context of

chronic pain. Without such inclusion, our models may fail to capture the full scope of factors that contribute to well-being in later life.

Resilience, as a framework, is particularly relevant here. Resilience focuses on outcomes that exceed expectations given the adversity faced by an individual (2,8). In the context of chronic pain, where biomedical approaches may emphasize disease and decline, the resilience framework may offer a more appropriate model. It captures how individuals maintain function, quality of life, and emotional well-being despite persistent pain. This model may offer a more comprehensive understanding of how older adults navigate the challenges of chronic pain and aging than the traditional successful aging paradigm.

Incorporating patient perspectives and expanding our frameworks to include resilience, as well as psychosocial components, will ultimately enrich our understanding of aging and provide a more holistic approach to supporting older adults living with chronic pain.

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