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Professional Ageism – Does It Exist?

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Abstract

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Ageism, which is vaguely defined with complex social roots and broad consequences, includes a span of intolerant knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviours towards older adults. Two contexts that are intensely accessed by older people are healthcare and long-term care. The ageing projections¹ show that this access will continue to increase. Nevertheless, there is scant literature on the real needs of care for older people in both contexts, seemingly a reflection of actual practice and indeed a situation that may be interpreted as ageist. The question that arises is whether or not these services are serving the older people well? Professional ageism is the label used to describe the attitudes shown towards older adults, namely the specific patient management biases that are based on negative misconceptions.² Furthermore, transitioning of care for older people from health to long-term care facilities is reported to be highly challenging for both service administrators and older people alike in that the latter are often labelled as ‘social cases’ or ‘bed-blockers’. ³ This paper presents the findings of a narrative literature review that explored the concept of professional ageism in health care and long-term care, emerging from highly rated medical, geriatrics and gerontology journals.