Appreciation for Comments and Perspectives

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Comments and perspectives offered in response to “Healthy Aging and Leisure: Research to support Taiwan’s service provision” are insightful and offer useful perspectives. Several thoughts occurred to me as I read the thoughtful comments.

Offering volunteer opportunities and experiences within a community accomplishes multiple goals. From an organizational perspective, volunteers can undertake work that might otherwise be incomplete or absent. Communities benefit from organizations that offer meaningful roles for older adults because service delivery expands and elders offer effort, expertise, and wisdom. These are resources that might otherwise be dormant. Aging adults often have skills and experiences that create opportunities for them to help others; and importantly, volunteering seems to improve the lives of those adults who are working to help others (Choi & Kim, 2011; Morrow-Howell et al, 2003). Individuals are able to meet the need for purposeful living by engaging with and contributing to their communities (Greenfield & Marks, 2004). In addition, the experience of volunteering serves as an opportunity for aging adults to pursue healthy physical, cognitive, and social lifestyles. Communities can leverage volunteering as a resource to meet service delivery needs and provide a supportive infrastructure for an aging society. Generally, aging adults and in an excellent position to serve their community and, more specifically, assist their peers who may need support.
According to Choi and Chou (2010) people who volunteer at a younger age, are more likely to continue to do so in retirement and older adulthood. As a result, developing programs that offer opportunities for all ages to volunteer will support the pursuit of volunteering in older adulthood. In addition, older adults who volunteer serve not only in the capacity of the volunteer role, but also role model healthy aging for people of all ages including people who will one day be elderly themselves. It may be useful for volunteers who wish to serve their communities in this way to be matched with a community need which would benefit by an aging adult’s experience and perspective.

Smith and Gay (2005) suggest that volunteering fits into the life course in different patterns. Although some people have a continuous pattern of volunteering and others volunteer sporadically throughout their lives, some adults experience a trigger or condition that draws them into the role of a volunteer at an older age. Thus, adults may initiate or reinitiate volunteering behavior patterns at any life stage. Importantly, programs and policies that support volunteerism offer an entry point to associated social and health benefits for all people and especially those in older adulthood.

I was also impressed with the arguments presented by Dr. Ho in “The Way of Aging”. Leisure service delivery is an especially important structure to support healthy aging. Dr. Ho rightly identifies healthy aging as a challenge for rural areas and low-income families. Attention in research and resources may address specific challenges and help to determine ways best serve people in these situations. Researchers and service providers are encouraged to consider aging adults as helpful resources to facilitate leisure engagement and address and resolve community problems. Aging adults have accumulated life skills, expertise, and perspective that can be leveraged
to create positive outcomes for diverse constituents including people young and old, families with low and high incomes, and communities in urban and rural areas.
References


