CLOSING SESSION

**Intimacy in Later Life: What You've Always Wanted to Know but were Too Timid to Ask**

**Abstract:**

Late life sexuality, and the tools to optimize it in older adulthood, receives little attention. Even health care and social service professionals rarely broach these topics, often for a host of complicated reasons stemming from discomfort, lack of knowledge or training, and ageism—or their combination. As a consequence, many older adults sense that they do not have social or clinical spaces in which to share and process “taboo” concerns about their sexual functioning and real needs for intimacy. These stymied sexual health conversations contribute to negative health outcomes among older adults, including depression, decreased quality of life, undetected or untreated sexually transmitted diseases, and reduced sexual satisfaction.

This session will elicit some of those unspoken questions in its aims to educate both professionals and older adults about the contributions of safe, satisfying, and healthy sexuality to global wellness in later life. Thus, in this closing session, participants will have an opportunity to anonymously ask expert panelists any outstanding questions about late life sexuality and intimacy. Participants will deposit their questions into a box throughout the conference to facilitate this. An interactive session, the panel’s moderator will pose these questions to the panelists— five experts in aging and sexuality—who hosted more focused sessions earlier in the conference. Neither the moderator nor the panelists will reveal participants’ names for any reason, at any time, to promote candor. Answers are not intended to substitute for consultation with your own medical doctor.

These topics of later life sexuality and tools to achieve sexual health and intimacy are rarely discussed openly. Even health care and social service professionals rarely broach these topics. As a result many older adults suffer in silence and avoid these ‘taboo’ questions when experiencing problems in these domains. In some circles the idea of continued sexuality and intimacy is abhorred including among professionals who work closely with older adults...SO, this session will bring forth some of those unspoken questions, and will help educate both the professionals involved and the older adult attendees on the importance of sexual health and intimacy to well being in later life.

**Panelists:**

**Justine Braford, Meri Goehring , Nisha McKenzie, Christina Pierpaoli Parker, Rita Zink**

**Justine Braford, LMSW, CST,** is founder and co-owner of Grand Rapids Specialty Therapy in Grand Rapids, MI. She is an AASECT certified sexuality therapist (CST) who has dedicated her career to helping individuals and couples find peace and joy in their sex lives while honoring the idea that this is unique for everyone.

**Meri Goehring, Ph.D., PT,** is a physical therapist and Board Certified Geriatric Clinical Specialist through the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties as well as a Certified Expert for the Aging Adult. She is an associate professor and associate chair of the Grand Valley State University Department of Physical Therapy in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She remains clinically active working primarily in adult rehabilitation. She currently performs research in the area of fall prevention.

**Nisha Mckenzie,** **PA-C**, **Certified Sexuality Counselor, ISSWSH Fellow**, is the founder and director of the Center for Women’s Sexual Health in Grand Rapids, MI. She is an AASECT certified sexuality counselor and teaches in the University of Michigan Sexual Health Program as well as in the GVSU PA Program. She speaks at medical and therapy conferences across the country with a dedication to helping providers understand how to better include sexual health into general health.

**Christina Pierpaoli Parker, MA, PhD-c**  is a fifth-year doctoral candidate in the Clinical Geropsychology doctoral program at the University of Alabama under the co-mentorship of Drs. Forrest Scogin and Martha R. Crowther. Her research and clinical work explore the intersection of older adults’ physical and psychological health, focusing on the adjustment to and behavioral management of chronic health conditions (e.g. HIV, metabolic syndrome, osteoarthritis). Current interests include developing psychoeducational interventions for understanding, treating, and improving sexual dysfunction in later life. She has published in the *Journals of Aging & Health*, *Sex & Marital Therapy*, and *The Clinical Gerontologist* and presented at international conferences. She translates her academic research for *Eng(aging),* her widely acclaimed blog on Psychology Today, which has landed her interviews as an aging expert on The Psychology Podcast with Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman and The Aging Literacy Podcast with Dr. Bill Thomas. Her forthcoming book*, Trixxx Aren’t Just For Kids*, written with Dr. Elizabeth DiNapoli, explores the science and stories of sex in later life.

**Iris Zink, MSN, ANP-BC,** has been a rheumatology Nurse Practitioner for 18 years. She is the immediate past president of the Rheumatology Nurses Society where she was president from 2015 to 2017. She has traveled extensively lecturing on a variety of topics pertaining to arthritis, women and autoimmune disease, laughter for healing and intimacy and chronic disease. She has published many times on topics about patient care and intimacy. She co-authored the chapters on HIV and arthritis, Osteoarthritis and Ehlers Danlos Hypermobility syndrome in Core Curriculum Rheumatology Nursing Text.
She is adjunct faculty at Michigan State University and Grand Valley State University and a passionate teacher, lecturer and caregiver. In 2016 Iris opened the first Nurse Practitioner run early arthritis clinic in Michigan to provide access to care for those individuals who are underinsured or uninsured. In 2017 she was honored to receive the Lupus Foundation of America’s Inspirational award for coining PJ day which will occur every May 2nd to raise money and awareness for Lupus.

**Moderator:**

**Jennifer Feuerstein, BAA, Certificate in Aging**, **Associate State Director, AARP MI**

**Jennifer Feuerstein** is a community organizer, activist, public speaker, and writer on issues related to older adults. She is the Associate State Director for AARP Michigan and a Crew Member for WOTV 4 as the on-air expert for ‘Encore Living’. Her work involves helping older adults live their best lives and advocating on their behalf. She writes for various publications including *Faith Grand Rapids* and *West Michigan Woman* magazines on topics related to aging. She was active in the rollout of the AARP initiative: Sex@50.

**Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe typical later life sexual health issues, as well as their biopsychosocial underpinnings;

2. Understand strengths, limitations, and contributions of different professions to addressing later life sexual health and intimacy concerns

3. Describe different strategies/tools for managing challenges to later life intimacy and sexual health

4. Appreciate how various, integrated factors (e.g. nutrition, exercise, stress management, sleep) influence and optimize sexual functioning in later life

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