

Stretching the Hands of Time

You can almost hear it anywhere people are working; they look forward to the day that they can quit the daily grind and retire. Visions of taking it easy on the beach, drinking iced tea, or going on a cruise around the world go through their minds. But walking down a neighborhood in Kailua, one might notice some retirees strolling nearby with their front-wheel walkers; however, are they accompanied by their children or a caregiver? The reality is that once the seniors retire from the workforce, they have less structure in their schedule, tempting them to watch television, sleep, and eat unhealthily. The lack of activity results in around seventy-seven percent of seniors having health problems, including Alzheimer's, diabetes, bone disease, and hypertension. Clarence T.C. Ching would have supported activities that would mediate these issues by encouraging retirees to remain active. This includes becoming involved in nonprofit organizations or part-time work, leveraging artificial intelligence to maintain vigilance over them while they remain independent, or mentoring the less fortunate while being cared for in return.

Today, the retirees have longer lifespans, where usual funding from pensions or savings may not be enough. They should remain active in a job that is not too demanding because even though they are healthy, their bodies are still slowly breaking down. An organization that focuses on matching seniors with employment should be established where they can continue to contribute to the society by using the skills that they already have. Activities can keep them healthy, which will allow them to live independently and healthier for a longer period of time.

Not everyone will agree with the upcoming solutions, some might think that seniors will be less open to staying active. Others might think that similar solutions have already been tested

and failed. In 2012, researchers found out that seniors are open to using stationary bikes, but they are distracted easily and lose motivation. They are now using virtual reality to create scenic views for the seniors, to keep their minds fixed on the landscape rather than the amount of time left. In Missouri, engineers utilized Kinect motion sensors to monitor them, but the seniors complain that they intrude their personal lives. There is also a device that the seniors wear around their neck so that they can alert the nearest hospital. I think that the senior citizens will prefer to join nonprofit organizations, have monitors in their houses, and travel to other countries if they know that they can continue to be healthy and independent.

In Japan, many engineers are trying to build robots that remediate the limitations caused by aging, to care for the seniors who comprise twenty-two percent of the population. Even in the United States today, age demographics have shifted due to the shrinking family sizes. Not too long ago families had two or more children and eventually, they cared for the aging seniors. Today, the smaller family size puts a greater burden of care on a smaller subset of the population. Luckily, due to advancements in technology, a practical solution can be built. Designers could create an app for smartphones that allows people to monitor seniors through the cameras in their house. Wearable devices such as smartwatches can monitor their vital signs and with the touch of a button, signal the ambulance to tend to them during an emergency.

If you go to some developing countries, you would be surprised by how far your US dollar can stretch. The cost of living in many other countries is much lower, to where one not only can live comfortably on American Social Security benefits, but also have live-in household help. In Hawai'i and many parts of the US, Social Security benefits can barely meet healthcare costs. There are developing countries that have a decently educated populace that could be

employed to care for our senior citizens that are willing to relocate there, such as the Philippines or Thailand. Healthcare available in these countries are not backward, in fact, procedures such as joint replacements attract medical tourism where out of pocket payments is cheaper than respective co-pays in the States. Additionally, the US senior may also mentor these caregivers to improve their living situation through mentoring or the paying of a living wage. A liaising organization should provide safe countries that would mutually benefit from such an arrangement, because the average senior might not be able to handle the hardships that one faces in the developing countries.

The Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation carries on the legacy of Mr. Ching through donating money to education systems, hospitals, and health programs, to “assist in the care of the needy, the destitute, the sick and the aged.” This foundation keeps the senior citizens as one of its primary goals, which is the reason to why I think that Mr. Ching would support my solutions. He wanted to support others and give back to his community, which he has accomplished through his organization.

By the year 2067, the senior citizens might have shorter lifespans because the health care system may not have improved. The three major solutions of encouraging seniors to work in nonprofit organizations, watch over them through artificial technology, and inspiring them to fly to developing countries will ensure Hawai'i's senior citizens remain independent and healthy longer. The elderly will not spend the rest of their days just converting oxygen into carbon dioxide, but they will actually be making an impact on their community.

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