Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved. Bridging Health Equity Across Communities

by Mijung Park, PhD, MSN, MPH

The speed of chronological age is the same for everyone. Everyday, we become older by virtue of our age at different speeds. In other words, some people age faster than others on a cellular level. So then the question is, what factors might influence whether one ages faster or slower than others? These are interesting scientific questions.

How do we measure our biological age? One of the biological markers of cellular aging is the length of a telomere. Telomeres are the protective caps at the end of each strand of DNA. They protect genetic ends of shoelaces. Telomeres get shorter each time a cell divides itself. Because cells constantly divide, telomeres get shorter with age. The length of telomeres is related to stress, lifestyle factors, and certain diseases like heart disease, smoking, or diabetes—factors that are known to speed up the aging process. Our study looked at telomere length in different areas of daily life, work, family life, and cultural practices. CHE also partners with the four main trauma centers in the city to help improve the level of care we offer to our patients.

Another community engagement activity is the annual Pitt’s Center for Health Equity: Making a difference in communities of color. CHE has a goal to reduce the major causes of excess mortality among underserved populations in Southwestern Pennsylvania. CHE does this by using a community-partnered approach to address health disparities. CHE partners with different organizations that encourage people to talk about this topic a lot among health and social service professionals. But it's not something that we talk about at the community level. The health conversations that we have at a community level are focused on protecting healthy behaviors and staying informed. But I want to take it a step further much more than this. Where does health equity fit in?

Questions I have. Great question. I think the foundation is understanding exactly what health equity means and how it affects a person's life. Health equity is the study of differences in both the health and health care of groups with different races, ethnicities, income levels and sexual identities. They're caused by social factors that can be changed. You often hear the term "social determinants of health" to describe the social factors that determine health outcomes.

Pitt’s Center for Health Equity: Making a difference in communities of color

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