

Nottingham
Biomedical Research Centre



*National Institute for
Health Research*

Frailty and resilience

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Pushing the frontiers of medical science

Content

- Reflections on:
 - frailty concepts
 - resilience concepts
- Clinical implications

Frailty

- New set of uses for an old word, meaning “vulnerability”
- Multiple meanings and usages in practice

Frailty meanings

- Lay meaning:
 - feeble, pitiful, weak in character, lacking in agency
- Ageism, where ageing is not celebrated but carries stigma?

Frailty meanings

- Some clinicians meaning:
 - scientific sounding label that denotes older people who don't need to be seen by surgeons and organ specialists, who should be taken away by geriatricians
- Ageism, where ageing is not celebrated but carries stigma?

Frailty meanings

- NHS meanings:
 - patients who are seen by geriatricians
 - patients at risk of hospitalisation
- A group that people struggle to find a politically correct word for:
elderly/geriatrics/seniors/senior citizens/elders;
frequent flyers/very high service users/etc

Frailty meanings

- Muddled minded meanings:
 - old
 - disabled
 - multi-morbid
- Slogan or buzzword for group acceptance

Frailty meanings

- Technical meanings:
 - physiological changes associated with or due to ageing
 - cumulative burden of deficits with age
- Physician meaning(s) vs patient understanding

State in which there is an exaggerated
& abnormal response to challenge

BGS Spring Meeting 2019

Issues: can we measure it sufficiently?

- Measurement tools validated as risk scores
 - against long term outcome
 - not the exaggerated response to challenge
- How do we recognise those who are close to a tipping point?

State in which there is an exaggerated
& abnormal response to challenge

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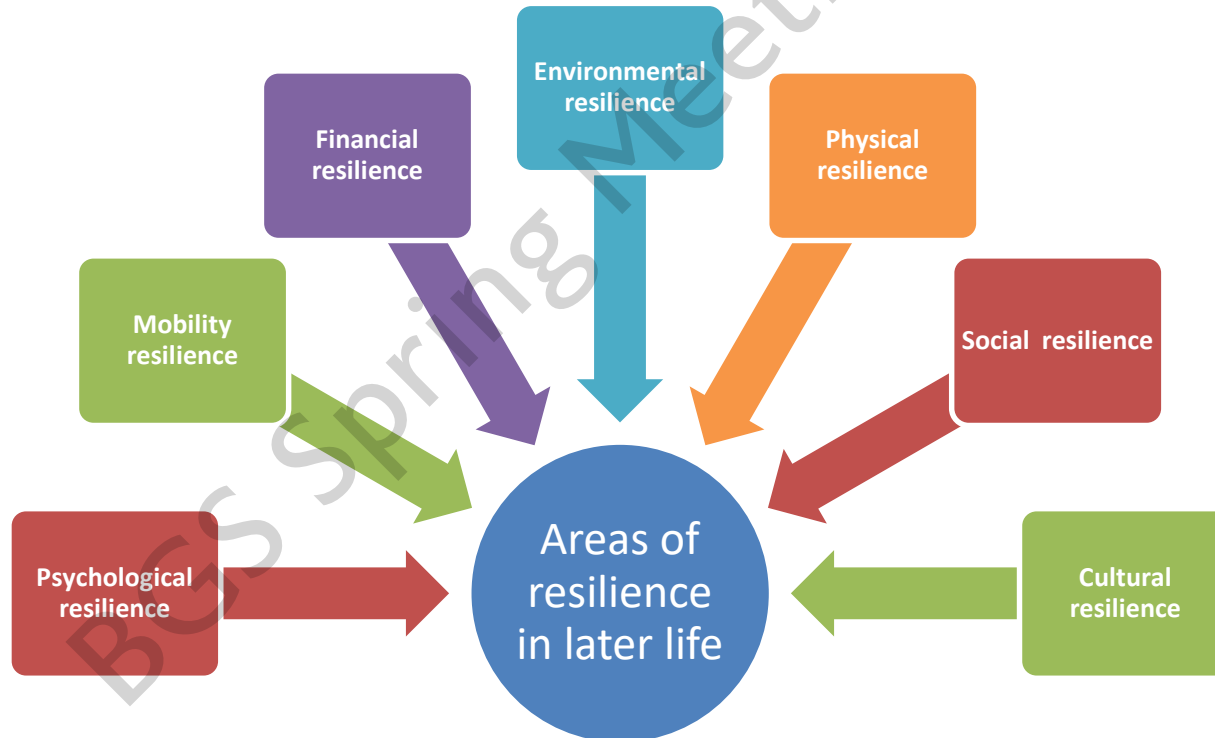
Issues: is it good enough clinically?

- Do you have to be old to be frail?
- Should we use frailty or some other word to mean more than physical vulnerability to a physical challenge?
- Are there different forms of frailty, depending upon what challenges people are vulnerable to, and how they respond to them?

Issues: what's it the reverse of?

- Negative concept
- Normal?
- Not frail?
- Robust? Strong, vigorous, sturdy, tough, powerful
- does it convey the response trajectory?
- Resilient? Able to withstand or recover quickly
from difficult conditions

Resilience multi-dimensional asset model



Resilience multi-dimensional asset model

- Resembles CGA process
- Reverse of resilience is not physiological frailty

Physical Resilience: Not Simply the Opposite of Frailty

Whitson, Cohen, Schmader, Morey, Kuchel, Colon-Emeric. JAGS 66:1459–1461, 2018

- Assuming
 - frailty means physiological frailty associated with ageing
 - resilience is divided into physical and psychological types
- Then
 - resilience (both types) applies across the life course, therefore not an ageing concept
 - even physical resilience is not only physiology – whereas frailty is
- And so
 - resilience is not the reverse of frailty
- It depends upon which meaning of the words we choose!

Clinical implications: positive language

- Use f-word carefully or avoid it with patients and their families
 - slogan, misinterpretation, labelling, unconscious bias
- Being “vulnerable” and close to a “tipping point”
- “How can we promote resilience?”

Diagnosis and prognosis

- "He / she doesn't seem too bad..."
"Independent"
"No significant PMH"
- Being vulnerable
 - "She hasn't eaten so well since Dad died"
- Being close to a "tipping point"
 - "We come round every day now"

Facilitating interventions in multiple asset domains

- How can we promote resilience?
 - She was better when she did them exercises
 - We'll ask the pharmacy for a dosette box
 - She can have lunch with me and the grandkids
 - I'm gonna talk to my sisters
 - I'm going to get that wheelchair
 - How can I get carers?

Summary

- The resilience concept offers a reverse of frailty, when frailty is used to mean something broader than physical frailty
- Its use helps develop rapport and support a holistic CGA process

References and acknowledgement

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