


Chapter 16

Micro-Credentials in Higher Education: A New Path for Gerontology

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ABSTRACT

The mission of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the importance and potential of microcredentials in advancing education and professional practice in Gerontology, emphasising the need for an adaptable, competency-oriented educational approach in this vital field. The following objectives are proposed: to reiterate the value of microcredentials as a strategic educational resource to meet the specific demands of Gerontology in higher education and to emphasise the need for a continued commitment to educational innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration to prepare trained gerontologists to meet the challenges of the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030.

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BACKGROUND

Population ageing is a global trend that presents both challenges and opportunities for public policies, health systems and societies in general. By 2050, the global population of older individuals will have more than doubled, reaching a total of 2.1 billion people (Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030).

Portugal is one of the countries in the European Union with the oldest population and where the ageing rate has grown exponentially in recent years. This brings challenges for all sectors, which means that networked responses are particularly important for healthy ageing. Overall, there is little evidence that older people today are in better health than previous generations. Good health prolongs life, this is a motto confirmed by medicine. The opportunities that come with increased longevity depend heavily on healthy ageing. People who experience these additional years of life in good health and continue to participate and be an integral part of families and communities strengthen societies; however, if the added years are dominated by poor health, social isolation or dependence on care, the implications for older people and society are much more negative.

The Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030, proclaimed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is a global initiative that seeks to catalyse significant changes in health and well-being policies for older people. The ageing of the global population is one of the most significant demographic transformations of the 21st century, with substantial implications for all aspects of society, including the economy, health systems, social structures and public policies.

The world's population is ageing at an unprecedented rate due to increased life expectancy and a falling birth rate, giving rise to different dynamics and challenges. The Decade of Healthy Ageing is not only a response to these challenges, but also an opportunity to restructure health and social systems in a way that promotes a long and healthy life for all.

Healthy Ageing encompasses the entire life course and is relevant to everyone, not just those who are currently disease-free. Intrinsic capacity at any time is determined by several factors, including underlying physiological and psychological changes, health behaviour and the presence or absence of disease. This is strongly influenced by the environments in which people have lived over the years. The social and economic resources and opportunities that people have over the life course influence their power to make healthy decisions and to give and receive support when they need it. Healthy ageing is therefore closely linked to social and economic inequality. Disadvantages in the areas of health, education, employment and income start early, reinforce each other and accumulate throughout life.

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