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Changes in Living Circumstances for the Aged in Saudi Arabia: Can Occupational Therapy Make a Difference?

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Introduction: Population aging is one of the most severe challenges the world has faced, and Saudi Arabia (SA) is no exception as the number of the elderly people is rapidly growing. There is an increasing need for delivering professional care to meet and satisfy their specific needs. However, health care services in aged care, and occupational therapy as a profession is relatively new to the Kingdom so we need to understand what culturally relevant occupational therapy interventions can promote healthy ageing in Saudi Arabia.

Objectives: The purpose of this paper is to present information about the challenges to providing aged care in Saudi Arabia and to explore the potential role that occupational therapy can, and should undertake for improved services for Saudi seniors, to increase their independence in daily function, wellbeing, and decrease the burden of care on families in particular.

Approach: Occupational therapy in other countries, including Australia, has been identified as a key profession that supports successful ageing. This knowledge will be used to explore international best practice and compare this with the challenges facing the Saudi health care system, and Saudi occupational therapy for them to be able to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and cultural relevance of interventions that support successful aging in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion: The paper will conclude by summarizing some of these challenges, but also potential strategies for developing occupational therapy to enhance the wellbeing, safety and independence of elderly Saudis.