

Psych**AGE** News

Information and commentary about older adult and carer wellbeing

Issue 4, 10th August, 2018: Sexuality, Eroticism and Sensuality

“It was lying naked in bed with him —right until the very end—that I miss the most,” this nearly 80 year old said to me yesterday of losing her husband to cancer. The sexual. It’s the cherry-on-top experience of our humanity that, for most, is not optional at all. It’s an integral part of our life and our living. It can be as relevant for a 20year old as it can be for a 90year old, even if some nuances about ability, drive or availability have changed.

What my client, this widow, said to me got me appreciating anew how vital it can be for people of all ages to engage in their sexuality and be able to explore the meaning of it or acknowledge the grief when it’s not there in a most cherished form.

In my book I share the concern of a University of New England researcher, Dr Alison Rahn, about how difficult it is for residents of care homes to attend to their sexual wellbeing because of legislation and staff attitudes. In an article last month entitled **Age is no barrier to sex, but the rules might be** Dr Rahn observes how even though the national reforms to aged care are promising, that there is a rising discontent from Boomers on the inadequacy of care homes to cater for the sexual health needs of their residents. Hopefully in time, with better funding, legislation and a weakening of ageist attitudes the situation will look a little more bright.

But even the discourse around ‘sexuality’ doesn’t quite cut it. I like how Esther Perel, world-renowned psychologist and relationship expert distinguishes between ‘sexuality’ as “doing sex” and ‘eroticism’ being about “the meaning of sex” which connects to imagination, relationship, pleasure and creativity. So even when sex or physical intimacy is no longer possible, we can still invite older adults to explore what it means to them. How might they connect to the erotic through memories or imagination? And let’s not forget how available and important the sensual can be. A rose. The wind. Velvet on the skin.



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