Master Class – Addressing the Sexual Rights of Older People

By: Dr. Sharron Hinchliff, Senior Lecturer, School of Nursing & Midwifery, University of Sheffield, UK and Dr. Catherine Barrett, Director of Celebrate Ageing, Australia

The sexual rights of older people are a fundamental component of human rights; however, there is currently no framework for addressing older people’s sexual rights. Using the Declaration of Sexual Rights developed by the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) as a basis, we present a framework for understanding the sexual rights of older people in order to improve awareness and support.

We will explore how the sexual rights of older people are seldom understood, respected or protected due to the sexuality of older people not being sufficiently recognized. For example, the social construction of old age tends to deny active sexuality, while the social construction of sexuality often rejects old age. Both can lead to the assumption that sexual rights are not important to older people.

A sexual rights framework for older people demands that attention is paid to all aspects of sexuality, promotes awareness of sexual agency, sexual identity, and sexual vulnerability, while emphasizing safety, protection, privacy, independence, and freedom. Neglecting to address the sexual rights of older people is a failure of care and an act of discrimination. Indeed, the World Health Organization (2015) report on Sexual Health, Human Rights and the Law asserts that the denial of access to education and services, the lack of protection from discrimination, and the failure to preserve privacy and confidentiality within health and social care can have a negative impact on health and well-being.

Master Class Objectives:

- to explore what we already know about older people’s sexuality
- to learn about sexual rights and how they can be applied to older people
- to examine the barriers and facilitators to implementing a sexual rights approach for older people
- to generate ideas about the ways that sexual rights can be applied in services and organisations

Presenter Biography

Dr. Sharron Hinchliff, Senior Lecturer, School of Nursing & Midwifery, University of Sheffield, UK

Dr Sharron Hinchliff is Senior Lecturer at the School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Sheffield. She has a PhD and a BSc (Hons) in Psychology, and has conducted research into gender and health for over 20 years. Sharron currently leads the sexual health and well-being, ageing, and gender programme of research at the University which focuses on understanding health-related behaviours to improve health and inform professional practice. She has published extensively in these areas, particularly older people’s sexual health and well-being, and her co-edited book ‘Addressing the sexual rights of older people: Theory, policy and practice’, is currently in press. See her personal website for further details: www.sharronhinchliff.com
Dr. Catherine Barrett, Director of Celebrate Ageing, Australia

Catherine Barrett has over 30 years’ experience working with older people as a clinician, educator, academic, researcher and capacity builder. Catherine’s research has included studying older people’s sexual subjectivities, sexual assault and older women, sexually transmissible infections and sexually and gender diverse older people’s experiences and needs.

In 2016 Catherine left her academic position to establish Celebrate Ageing (see: celebrateageing.com), a self-funded National program established to challenge ageism and build respect for older Australians. The Celebrate Ageing Program includes the OPAL Institute (see opalinstitute.org), a project promoting the sexual rights of older people. The OPAL Institute aims to build capacity for change by empowering older people and resourcing service providers. The OPAL Institute includes a free sexuality policy for residential aged care and sexual boundaries policy for home care services. These resources seek to promote change. Catherine is currently coediting a book on the sexual rights of older people for Routledge and is currently working on a chapter on creative methodologies in sexuality research with older people – in an edited volume on sexuality methodologies for Routledge.