PROMOTING CONSCIOUS AND ACTIVE LEARNING AND AGING

HOW TO FACE CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES?

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PROMOTING ACTIVE AGING INSIDE PORTUGUESE RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS FOR THE ELDERLY: IS THERE SOMETHING MISSING?

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Abstract
The definition of active aging endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002 requires from different professionals and institutions a systematic work with people along the process of ageing, involving the promotion of health, the assurance of conditions of security and the offering of opportunities for participation, including learning activities that promote personal development and well-being. Seniors living in residential care homes are not excluded from this definition and it is important to know how these institutions are trying to respond to the challenge launched by the WHO about a decade ago. This chapter is based on an empirical study carried out in eight residential homes for the elderly in the municipality of Coimbra, Portugal, and involved a sample of 146 old people who answered a structured interview protocol. The main objective of this research was to elicit elders’ perceptions about their life in institutions, in order to outline possible changes with the goal of promoting their quality of life in the last years of their life in a context different from their family or their own homes. The focus of our analyses in this chapter is on the elders’ answers about their participation in learning and recreational activities promoted by institutions where they live and also about their self-perceptions about their abilities to learn and to contribute to a dynamic environment inside the institution that goes beyond the ‘assistentialist’ perspective of these entities. Despite the small size of the sample, data showed that there is a long way to go in order to effectively

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