

# Frailty

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Charlotte noted that in the past few months her friends and family had been asking her how her father was doing. He was now 84 years old and did not have his three children till the end of his early forties but was very healthy then. The family and friends were asking Charlotte if there was something wrong with her father. Charlotte did not notice as much it seems as what these people saw though she did note that her father was certainly not what he was ten years ago.

Her neighbor was a nurse and mentioned the same thing about her father. Her nurse neighbor friend also noted her father was not as able to do as much as in the past. As a result, Charlotte decided one day to ask her nurse neighbor what seems to be happening. When Charlotte was talking to her nurse friend and told her about her father her nurse friend said that her father was getting frailer. Charlotte did not know what frail meant and in asking her nurse friend what it was her friend said this would take some time to address what this is and what to do. So, Charlotte's nurse friend said let's get a cup of coffee and discuss what frailty is and how to deal with frailty.

As Charlotte and her nurse friend sat down in a coffee shop Charlotte's nurse friend said she wanted to address the issue of frailty of her father and what that meant. First, Charlotte's nurse friend said she would give a definition of frailty. She said to Charlotte that frailty is defined as 'age related process of bodily decline, characterized by significant vulnerability to adverse health outcomes.' Charlotte thought this was a difficult change of her father to deal with and her nurse friend said that was true as frailty is hard not just for the patient but for the family and friends. Thus, frailty can be a hard burden on the patient and family and friends.

Charlotte's nurse friend told her that the criteria of noting if someone does or does not have frailty are the following. There are five criteria she said. First, is exhaustion compared to what they did have recently in the past and now. Second, is a weaker hand grip. The hand muscles are a good insight into the strength of the rest of the muscles if they are strong or weak and if weak the rest of the body muscles will be weak. Third, is there slower walking speed than before, which can happen quickly. Fourth is unintentional weight loss, generally comes with

somewhat of a lower appetite. Fifth is low physical activity. These are not common and sometimes in the elderly just one or two occur.

Charlotte commented to her nurse friend that she was seeing over the last few months all of these five criteria from her father but some sooner and changing quicker than the others. Regardless she was having all five and this started to clarify to Charlotte what was happening to her father. Charlotte asked what was the first characteristic of having frailty and her nurse friend said weakness, then slowness, and low physical activity preceded exhaustion and weight loss in most all of men and women who in the past were not frail. Charlotte had noted that her father was weak, and she noted that in general. This was manifested in having trouble to go to get groceries as he was weak in just lifting his groceries and thus most anything in his house.

Charlotte's nurse friend said there are common features of frailty. People who are frail usually have three or more of the five symptoms that often go together. These include unintentional weight loss (10 or more pounds within the past year), muscle loss and weakness, a feeling of fatigue, slow walking speed and low levels of physical activity. Charlotte noted all of these in time but not all together that started at the same time. Slowly over time Charlotte had noted that first the weight loss in her father occurred. Then weakness and fatigue, which resulted in slower walking ability and his not being able to do much or less than before. E.g., he used to be able to clean his house but now he did not have much ability to clean his house and if so, took many more days to get the same work that took hours in the past. Charlotte's nurse friend agreed with what happened to Charlotte's father happened, that is so many elderly become frail and largely affects their life's ability to live well.

Charlotte asked her nurse friend what age does frailty usually start? Her nurse friend says generally after 65-year-old some start with the issues Charlotte had just heard about. However, Charlotte's nurse friend said that usually as men and women get older then the start of frailty worsens and slowly gets worse and worse. She clarified to Charlotte that over time more and more percentage of the population get frailty. So as people grow older then frailty can be more and more expected.

Charlotte asked her nurse friend how long do people live once they get frailty symptoms. Certainly, they live much shorter life span than if they had not

developed any of the signs and symptoms of frailty. However, most women with some of the symptoms of frailty may only live a few years and men a little shorter than women.

Her nurse friend told Charlotte to see the larger picture of those who are frail as already discussed. She said the giants of being old are as mentioned more immobility, instability and thus increase risk of falls, urinary incontinence and intellectual impairment. The question Charlotte could not understand is why some people get these symptoms of frailty and others don't. Charlotte's nurse friend said that is hard to say, but generally this is related to disease states someone already had or past history of significant health issues and slow to recovery. It is the slow to recovery, which is the most important issue. Generally, if slow to recover shows either a less strong physical body, especially muscles before illness or the illness causes a decline, which is notable the patient did not have before the illness.

Charlotte asked her nurse friend about some of the diseases that could cause this frailty. Some which can have cause over time are high blood pressure and diabetes over decades. Next would be major surgeries which required months and years to get back to normal. Other health issues could be related past cancers and the treatment a person had. All of these can slowly over time worsen as one gets older to see that they are not what they were even five years ago. Also, arthritis issues which can slow people down and cannot do as much as they had done in the past. Major issues of health which brings on frailty are strokes or heart attacks and frailty can come much earlier with frailty.

Charlotte was very concerned about the decline of her father and after the discussion in more detail she asked her nurse friend if her father could get better. Charlotte's nurse friend said it could possibly get better, but several things need to be addressed. First, whatever it is which makes him worse needs to be addressed if possible. For example, control arthritis, which is key. Second, take away medicines, if possible, which has negative effects, like for example some medicines which make the muscles painful. Then consider the three following exercises, which can help lessen or limit frailty. First, have resistance exercises. Second, have strength training. Third, try to walk or run. All of these done slowly will limit the frailty and even allow a person to get better. Key is these exercises daily and slowly advance the number of exercises you are doing.

Charlotte was so very concerned she ask her nurse friend if she would go with her to see her father and see if they could begin to change the course of her father. So, the next day they went and started to talk with him about some of the exercises but also to see if he was having some health issues or medicines, which could make his frailty worse. After discussion his health issues were just after he had a heart attack three months ago and hopefully, he could turn around his frailty with more health exercises as they discuss with him.

Charlotte was concerned though about the heart attack and frailty of her father and was wondering if he would rapidly decline and be dead within a year. Her nurse friend said that certainly that could happen with someone his age and having a heart attack and steadily declining. She told her nurse friend how concerned she was and fearful of the future for both of them. Her nurse friend told her that she understands the fears but there is another way to look at this situation of frailty aside from the exercise and addressing her current health issues.

Charlotte's nurse friend told Charlotte that her hope was not in this world or in this world's health care alone though they are important. What was important is the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Though Charlotte had heard some about Jesus Christ, she did not know much. Charlotte's nurse friend said that all of us in the world have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Getting this hope is telling Jesus Christ that you want to have the new life through Jesus Christ which gives us eternal hope in this world and eternal hope after we die.

After Charlotte spent several hours with her nurse friend talking about the saving grace of Jesus Christ, she wanted to have Jesus Christ as her savior. She prayed, 'Dear Lord Jesus I am a sinner and am not worthy of the hope you have can give me through you. I ask you to give forgive me from my sins as you died on the Cross for my sins. You were buried and rose from the dead three days later and I believe this and you are my Savior.

After this prayer Charlotte told her father and her nurse friend how much joy and happiness and hope she now has in her life after having Jesus in her life.

