

seeing their financial assets eroded or totally dissipated.

Numbers and Health Needs of the Elderly

There are now more than 19 million Americans over the age of 65. Among them, about 57 percent are women and 43 percent are men. This disproportion in sex distribution has been increasing steadily since about 1930--a trend of importance in any prescription drug study, since the use of these drugs by women is significantly higher than that by men.

In connection with the elderly, the term aging has often been considered synonymous with illness. There is, in fact, no necessary relationship between the two, but it is undeniably a fact that illness strikes the elderly far more frequently than it does younger age groups.

Approximately 80 percent of the elderly--in comparison with 40 percent of those under 65--suffer from one or more chronic diseases and conditions.

Arthritis and rheumatism afflict 33 percent; heart disease, 17 percent; high blood pressure, 16 percent; other cardiovascular ailments, 7.5 percent; mental and nervous conditions, 10.5 percent; hearing impairments, 22 percent; and visual problems, 15 percent.