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CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE
IN GERIATRIC MEDICINE:
UTILIZING QUALITY OF LIFE AS A MEASURE
OF EFFECTIVENESS OF CARE

Helena Xeros

Mentor: Anya Plutynski

What does it mean to age well? What is health and well-being in old age? These questions are both normative and empirical; thus, this thesis uses interdisciplinary methods to answer them. I conducted interviews with geriatric physicians and reviewed the philosophical literature on quality of life in medicine to allow me to address the unique challenge of articulating an understanding of quality of life as we age. In geriatrics, the focus is on ameliorating the health challenges associated with aging, and improving quality of life. But quality of life is a moving target. While there is no consensus on the definition of quality of life in bioethics, or the general philosophical literature, there are measures that experts in health policy use to improve medical decision-making and evaluate the comparative effectiveness of health care. Geriatric medicine provides a unique challenge, as assessing health in old age is a matter of descriptive and functional information, as well as subjective judgment. My aim is to argue for some objective features that can be used at the policy level to evaluate effectiveness of health care providers.