Evolving Insights About the Impact of Sensory Deficits in the Elderly

In this issue of the journal, we are presented with observational data about the high prevalence of dual (hearing and vision) sensory impairment, as well as evidence of an association between hearing impairment and cognitive decline, among the elderly. Because
caring for older adults means focusing on improving and maintaining function, these articles show the potential for correcting hearing loss and visual loss so that elders can function better with appropriate treatment. Although there is insufficient evidence to recommend screening for both types of impairment, efficacious treatments exist for both, and physicians should be attentive to signs of either impairment. The finding that more input to the brain through better hearing may improve cognition is appealing and worth further study. More work is needed on assessing whether attention to case identification of sensory impairment, and appropriate treatment, improves patient-centered outcomes in older adults. With the expanding population of the elderly, multiple sensory deficits will likely become of sufficient population burden that we cannot afford to neglect them.

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