UTHealth Houston
Institute on Aging

Perspectives on Living Longer from the Social Sciences

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Population aging is a huge accomplishment, but …

2.5 older adults per caregiver

Caregiver shortage



Personal healthcare spending for older adults is 2.5 higher than adults under 65

Health disparities



(82%) of older adults say the U.S. health care system is not prepared to address their needs

Misalignment



US Census Bureau 2023; Wolff, J. et al. *Health Affairs,* 2025; CMS 2025; John A. Hartford foundation 2024

Longevity is a team sport

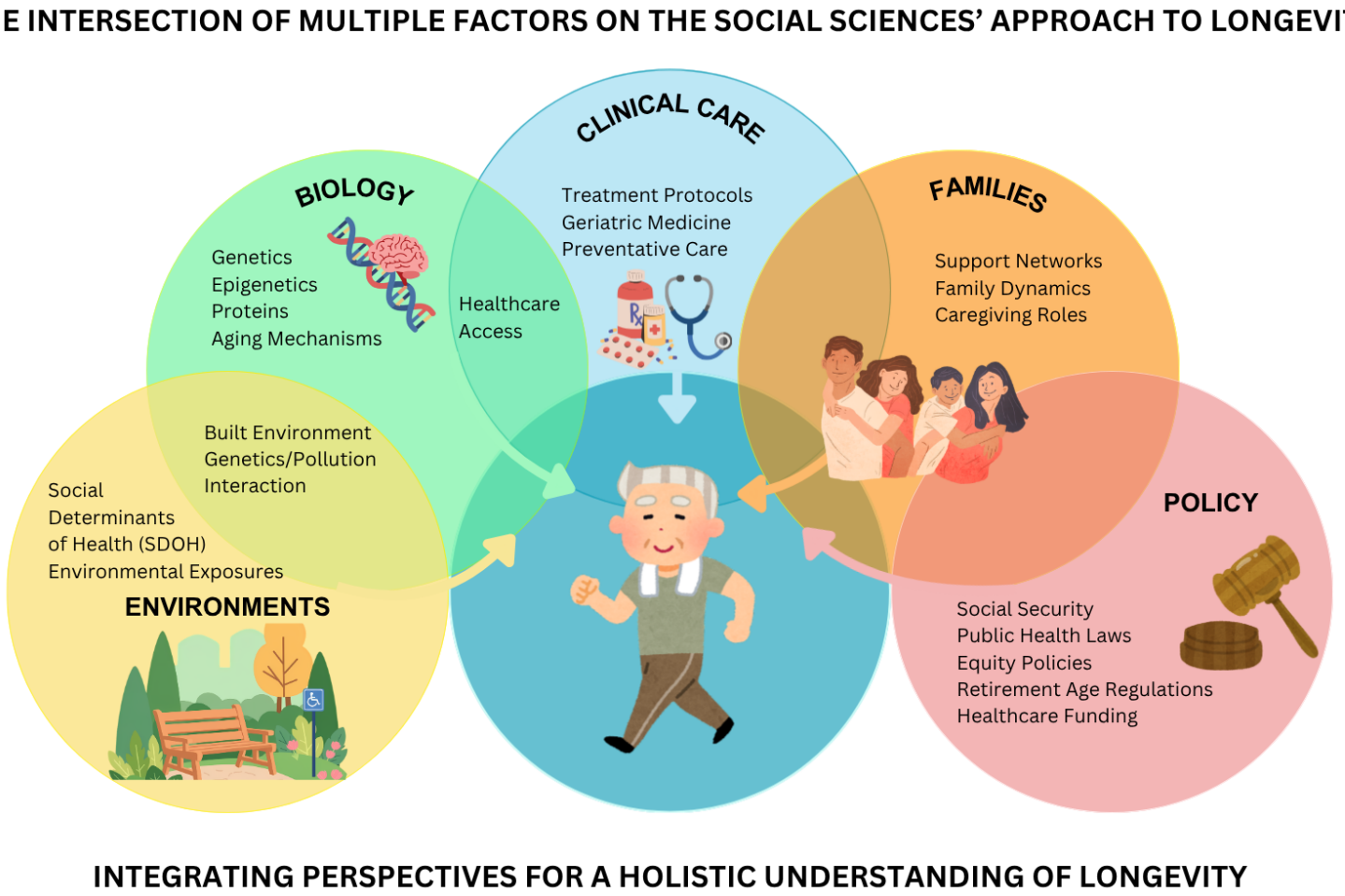


Image obtained with help from Gemini

If you remember nothing else…

I am going to make three points

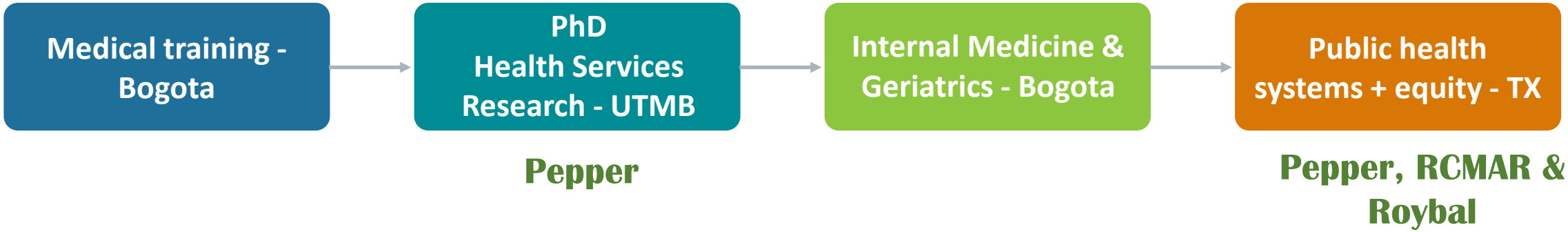
1. Human aging happens in lives, not laboratories.
2. For adults experiencing disparities, context is not background. It is a mechanism.
3. Team science is how we protect rigor, relevance, and hope.

My path started at the bedside

Geriatrics taught me that every clinical decision impacts more than one life.

As a geriatrician, I learned that a patient does not bring one disease to the clinic. They bring a life.

As a scientist, I learned that interactions, environments, and policy are more than situational variables. They are conditional mechanisms.



This path changed my research question from "What disease does this person have?" to "What conditions allow this person and family to achieve ***what matters most*** to them?"

A story: Mrs. Garcia

Mrs. Garcia

78 years old
Diabetes, arthritis, memory concerns
Daughter is her caregiver
Two buses to clinic
Worries about being a burden

A disease lens asks:

How do we optimize her A1c, blood pressure, pain, and memory workup?

A social science lens also asks:

What is the work of healthcare? Who carries it? What support is missing? What matters most to her?

Point 1: Aging happens in lives, not laboratories

Biology gives us mechanisms.
Lives give those mechanisms meaning.



The job of the social sciences is to connect levels without forgetting the person.

Point 2: For older adults experiencing health disparities, context is a mechanism

Context is not a footnote.

It shapes exposure, diagnosis, treatment, caregiving, trust, and follow-up.

Language & culture

Immigration & policy

Family caregiving

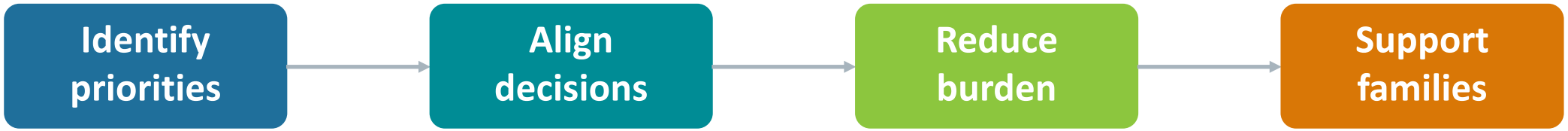
Access & trust

If we treat context as noise, we design interventions that fail the people who need them most.

The question that changes the visit

What matters most to you now?

For older adults with multimorbidity, this question turns competing guidelines into a care plan.



This is where geriatrics, public health, and team science meet.

What social science adds to a geroscience team

Meaning

What outcome matters to the person and family?

Mechanism

How do social conditions shape biological and clinical trajectories?

Measurement

How do we capture context without blaming individuals?

Translation

How do we design interventions that can work in real communities?

Social science is not the “disparities slide.” It is part of the method.

My current work

patient priorities care

Choosing what matters.
Doing what works.

NIA IMPACT COLLABORATORY
TRANSFORMING DEMENTIA CARE

Mexican Health & Aging Study

GOAL: WALK DOG OUTSIDE ONCE A WEEK

Much Less Than Expected (-2)	Less Than Expected (-1)	Expected Outcome (0)	Better Than Expected (+1)	Much Better Than Expected (+2)
Unable to go outside with dog	Does not walk dog but goes outside with dog	Walk dog outside once a week	Walk dog outside twice a week	Walk dog outside three times a week

Goal not achieved — Goal achieved

CREATING LONGITUDINAL HEALTHY AGING COHORTS IN TEXAS
CLINICAL CARE · FAMILIES · POLICY · ENVIRONMENTS · BIOLOGY
Family Resulment · Data Movement · Policy Feedback
INTEGRATING PERSPECTIVES

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A LIFELONG UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH IN TEXAS COMMUNITIES

Point 3: Team science is how we protect rigor, relevance, and hope.

When research is under attack, relationships become infrastructure.

In uncertain times, the answer is not to retreat into smaller questions. It is to build teams that can defend evidence, serve communities, and train the next generation.



Trust



Mentorship



Community



Rigor



Courage

In conclusion, my major point is…

Longevity is a team sport.

If we want longer lives to become better lives, we need science that connects cells to systems, clinics to communities, and discoveries to the people most often left out.

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Questions and Comments

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