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Book review

How To Handle Later Life

Marion Shoard (Reviewed by Daniel Collerton)

Amaranth Books, Dorking, UK 2017, ISBN 978-0-9567615-2-1

This is a big book: large in size, scope and ambition. In some thousand pages in 41 chapters, Marion Shoard sets out with the hope of enabling readers to live as happily and healthily as possible. I think she succeeds pretty well.

The chapters are divided into 12 sections: growing older, housing, connections (social contacts), the world of healthcare (how the NHS is structured), healthcare provision for specific disorders, practical help, help from the council, out and about (mobility), representatives and advisors, money, hospitals, and end of life. Each section has several chapters which focus on more restricted areas. Health provision, for example, has chapters on strokes, anxiety and depression, falls, continence, and dementia though not the chronic physical diseases such as COPD, arthritis, diabetes, or heart disease which are also common in later life. The book ends with a glossary, 30 pages of useful organisations to contact, additional references for each chapter, and an extensive index.

Each chapter is clearly structured with numerous headings, is introduced with an orientation to what is covered in it, and ends with a useful list of key points. They are well-written in an engaging style with a fair-minded description of options, but never the sense that the author is imposing her own view; though it is clear that she has plenty of experience in this area; backed up by a lot of research and consultation. Case examples of people and services are used throughout to give practical suggestions of what people can consider. Information is

up-to-date and accurate, and I could not see many gaps. Browsing through it, I found out quite a lot that I did not know.

Readers are expected to use it as a reference volume; looking at specific chapters as their needs dictate. This is facilitated by systematic cross-referencing. Though it is not primarily written for professionals, I gave it to a couple of trainees to read, both of whom found it helpful. I also took one of my patients as an example and worked through several chapters to see what else might be available to help her. A couple of productive avenues suggested themselves, so on the clinical level, I do not doubt its usefulness for any department working with older people. As the author points out herself, all of the information within it can be found on the internet, but not so consistent, coherent, and well organised. It would also be personally useful to many people. Though its size means that the cost is fairly high, you do get a lot for your money.

Its limitations are those to be expected in any manual, no matter how large. Not all subjects are covered in detail, for example physical health as I noted earlier, and unless it is revised regularly some of the information can be expected to date fairly rapidly, that around access to care as an instance. There is also the usual challenge of turning information into effective action.

For the next couple of years, however, it is the best collection of sound advice that I have come across.

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