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Book Review: Aging in Rural Places Policies, Programs, and Professional Practice

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Book Review

Aging in Rural Places: Policies, Programs, and Professional Practice

Kristina Hash, Elaine T. Jurkowski, & John A. Krout

2014

New York, NY: Spring Publishing Company, LLC

336 pages

Softcover: \$70.00 US

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According to current statistics (USDA, 2015), nonmetro populations are seeing a 4-year trend of declining population(s). Although this decline in residents has not been equitably distributed across all of rural America, this tendency has a direct correlation to the foundational message of *Aging in Rural Places*, and how this migration in rural areas is impacting older adults, aging in place, caregiving, and professional service delivery. As introduced in the beginning of the book, we are living in “an aging world” (p.3), which should be of local, national, and international interest to professionals from a range of specialties and approaches.

The structure of this book is organized into five parts: Introduction, Health and Human Service Needs of Rural Older Adults, Providing Health and Human Services to Rural Older Adults, Competent Practice in Rural Areas, and Conclusions and Future Directions. Within the five parts, there are thirteen chapters, which include contributions from an additional eighteen authors: experts in dentistry, geriatrics, health education, law, medicine, nursing, policy, and social work. With the inclusion of multiple perspectives throughout the book, it enhances the experience for the reader, and strengthens the essential need and focus on interprofessional collaboration and practice with older adults in rural communities.

This text offers expanded and current considerations impacting the interconnection of rural America and gerontology. Technology was a topic that was introduced throughout the text, and ideas and interventions such as telehealth monitoring and telemental health were proposed as examples of programs and initiatives that have been implemented with success. Other additions to the literature include a strong orientation to practice and the importance of recognizing the diverse structure of professional networks, with chapter nine focusing on interdisciplinary teams and models of teamwork.

As indicated in the title, the book includes the basis for policy implementation in rural areas, and strategies and competencies in regard to how and where policy should originate and strengthen support to older adults in rural settings. For example, the authors encourage supportive funding measures be extended to the National Rural Health Policy and Community Development Program, which not only promotes national policies that impact rural communities, but also addresses gaps in service through development and maintenance of projects and activities aimed to strengthen residents, access to services, workforce, and health care systems (HRSA, 2014). The text also calls on all professionals to take an active role in policy formulation

and translation, as well as issues such as economic viability and transportation, which need attention through continued research and policy development (pp. 280-281).

In addition to the outlined chapters of the book, the authors provide supplemental information through case studies/vignettes, a list of useful websites and resources at the conclusion of each chapter, as well as audio podcasts of interviews with scholars and professionals in the field. The supplemental information that this text provides is instrumental in course development, especially since classrooms are moving to a more hybrid platform with online components imbedded in each week/module.

From a foundational perspective, this book offers readers an introduction to key issues of persons aging in rural areas. Health and wellness, transportation, housing, long-term care, poverty, needs of special populations, along with the inclusion of social and gender minorities, are all beneficial foci for health and human service professionals and students interested in advocating for and working with older adults in rural areas. In particular, social work students interested in acquiring a knowledge base in both the area and population examined in this text would benefit from the structure and content of *Aging in Rural Places*. This book lends well to the learning needs of a student and/or professional starting in the field of gerontology; especially if relocating to a rural area, with minimal knowledge of the culture and needs of the residents.

In conclusion, the authors' efforts to compile and publish a book which engages us in conversation surrounding the importance and immediacy of issues of all older adults, but specifically rural older adults, is paramount given the rapid population aging that is occurring around the world. Although the focus is primarily on local and regional rural areas of the United States, we must also be mindful of the global interconnections, and how older adults across the globe are being impacted by the lack of resources and services available to support them as they age. This also allows us to call on colleagues from around the world, to focus their research and policy practice on the complex issues of aging in rural areas, and to improve the quality of life for rural communities and their aging residents.

References

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