We consider as axiomatic the view that social work practice must be based on empirically tested and verified knowledge. Yet the empirical basis of support for interventions is all but absent from practitioners’ considerations as they make clinical decisions in routine practice. The premise of this book is that social work must redouble its efforts to devise ways to ensure that the best available empirically tested knowledge is used in practice. We believe that one means to facilitate utilization of such knowledge by practitioners is to incorporate it into readily available, accessible, and professionally sanctioned practice guidelines. The need for empirically supported guidelines for intervention has become all the more pressing with the advent of managed care and the associated demands throughout the practice environment for greater accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Practice guidelines for a variety of practice tasks are already in use by service organizations and other professions, and they are increasingly entering the public discourse in social work. Convinced that social work needs to develop research-based guidelines, we invited some of the key scholars in social work practice to focus on the challenge of developing practice guidelines for social work. Accordingly, this book explores a number of critical conceptual, methodological, and organizational issues that are related to the development by social work of research-based practice guidelines for intervention and their use in practice.

We first floated the ideas for this volume with our colleagues Eileen Gambrill, of the University of California at Berkeley; Jeanne Marsh, of the University of Chicago; and Lynn Videka, of the State University of New York at Albany. We thank them for their enthusiastic support and acknowledge their early influence on the planning of this project. On the basis of the book’s conception, authors were selected and invited to prepare chapters, first versions of which were presented at a working conference on social work practice guidelines hosted in May 2000 by the George Warren Brown School.
of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. The conference provided a forum for presenting and discussing the ideas expressed here and for shaping the agenda for advancing social work guidelines. The contributions to this volume represent revised and updated versions of the works originally presented at the conference, many of which had to be appreciably abbreviated to meet the length limitations of this volume.

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CONTRIBUTORS

MARYANN AMODEO, PH.D., Associate Professor, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Boston University
NINA L. ARONOFF, PH.D., Assistant Professor, Social Work Program, Wheelock College
WILLIAM F. BACON, PH.D., Associate Vice President, Research and Evaluation, Planned Parenthood of New York City, Inc.
DARLYNE BAILEY, PH.D., Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dean of the College Teachers College, Columbia University
ANNE E. FORTUNE, PH.D., Professor, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, School of Social Welfare, State University of New York
MARK W. FRASER, PH.D., John A. Tate Distinguished Professor, Associate Dean for Research, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
EILEEN GAMBRILL, PH.D., Hutto Patterson Professor, School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley
MATTHEW OWEN HOWARD, PH.D., Associate Professor, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University
JEFFREY M. JENSON, PH.D., Professor, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver
STUART A. KIRK, PH.D., Professor, Marjorie Crump Chair, Department of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles
JEANNE C. MARSH, PH.D., Professor, School of Social Service Administration, The University of Chicago
MARK A. MATTAINI, DSW, Associate Professor, Director, PhD Program in Social Work, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois, Chicago
EDWARD J MULLEN, DSW, Wilma & Albert Musher Chair Professor, School of Social Work, Columbia University
WILMA PEEBLES-WILKINS, PH.D., Dean and Professor, School of Social Work, Boston University
ENOLA K. PROCTOR, PH.D., Frank J. Bruno Professor of Social Work Research, Associate Dean for Research, Director, Center for Mental Health Services Research, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University
WILLIAM J. REID, PH.D., Distinguished Professor, School of Social Welfare, State University of New York, Albany.
Contributors


BRUCE A. THYER, PH.D., Dean and Professor, School of Social Work, Florida State University

LYNN VIDEKA, PH.D., Professor, School of Social Welfare, Director, Center for Human Services Research, University at Albany-State University of New York

LUIS H. ZAYAS, PH.D., Shanti K. Khinduka Distinguished Professor of Social Work, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University
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