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The delivery of services to older adults is a vital and expanding part of professional practice in the allied health professions. With the growth of this field has come recognition of the need for practice approaches that are empirically based and age-specific, that integrate “micro” and “macro” perspectives, and that are informed by contemporary themes in the fields of aging and social work.

This book is designed for students and professionals interested in serving older adults through direct practice. It reflects the needs that have emerged in the field, providing

- empirically based, age-specific interventions
- integrated “micro” (individual) and “macro” (policy-level) content
- a conceptual framework that recognizes contemporary themes in aging and social work

The book is organized in four parts: part 1 addresses theories and demographic realities; part 2 examines common psychological problems that arise in later life; part 3 considers the dynamics of family and work; and part 4 discusses sociopolitical realities that affect an aging population. Case examples are used throughout the text to integrate and illustrate specific interventions.

Part 1 includes chapters 1 through 4. In chapter 1 we review changing demographics, based on age, ethnicity, health, marital status, and living conditions. We review traditional and contemporary theories of aging in chapter 2 and introduce an integrated gerontological practice approach and the stages associated with this approach in chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

Part 2, which includes chapters 5 through 9, addresses psychological topics, including anxiety (chapter 5), depression (chapter 6), suicide (chapter 7), substance abuse (chapter 8), and dementia (chapter 9).
In part 3 we review social psychological issues, including social work practice with older families (chapter 10), end-of-life care (chapter 11), bereavement in the later years (chapter 12), and work and retirement (chapter 13).

Part 4, which addresses sociopolitical topics, includes economic policies (chapter 14), poverty in late life (chapter 15), health policies (chapter 16), and quality-of-life issues and important social services (chapter 17).

Many gerontology practitioners will struggle to apply these interventions effectively in demanding work settings that will require them to prioritize their work according to their clients’ and agency’s resources. Many age-specific interventions described here will require modification as the baby boomers and younger cohorts age. We encourage others to supplement and expand on what we present here. We focus on the most vulnerable older people, but we celebrate the many older people who age “successfully.” Although we focus on social workers, other gerontological practitioners can modify the interventions described here in accordance with their clients’ needs and their professional requirements.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Many people contributed to the development of this book. I am grateful to Rick Reamer, who approached me about writing the book and provided many excellent suggestions. Connie Corley read each chapter and offered specific feedback that enhanced the substance of the book. John Michel believed in and supported this project from the beginning, and this book was conceptualized, organized, and written under his direction and encouragement. I am especially grateful to Amanda Barusch, a gifted scholar, who collaborated with me on this project. Her integrity, enthusiasm, and commitment, more than anything else, resulted in the completion of this project. Dean Tony Tripodi of Ohio State University encouraged this project at every phase. Polly Kummel, an outstanding copy editor, substantially improved the book’s clarity. Other colleagues who provided support include Shantha Balaswamy, Christine Price, Sandy Sullivan, and Gil Greene.

My family supported the writing at every stage. My older sister, Dr. Barbara Richardson, sent me daily e-mails to keep me on track during the most difficult periods. I can’t thank her enough for her unconditional support. My younger sister, Janice Snowden, also provided unconditional support in numerous ways. I am forever indebted to them. I love and appreciate my daughter, Nikki Thomas, for boosting my spirits, making me smile, and teaching me about life while I worked on this. No one deserves more recognition than my husband, Michael Thomas, who read and edited every chapter and learned more about aging than he wanted. His love, generosity, and humor forced me to keep the book in perspective. I dedicate this book to my mother, Marjorie Richardson, to my mother-in-law and father-in-law, Joy and Gerald Thomas, and to all older people, who deserve as much quality of life as anyone.
It is a privilege to work with someone as dynamic, creative, and informed as Virginia Richardson, and I am grateful for her invitation to join in the development of this exciting book. I appreciate the counsel and support of Connie Corley, who not only read each chapter but encouraged us every step of the way. And the Columbia University Press team has been terrific. The University of Utah College of Social Work provides a work environment with the ideal mix of support and challenge—support from our dean and challenge from our students. For this I am always grateful. But most of all I am indebted to my family: Larry, Nathan, Ariana, Sunshine, and Maddie, who make life worth living; and Dr. Maurice Barusch, who is my favorite example of successful aging.
GERONTOLOGICAL PRACTICE
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY