

Critical Engagements with Aging and Care

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A predicted and significant increase in the number of elderly has generated a call for increased services and care from many advocates and analysts. In addition to the need for quality care, advocacy groups and researchers have urged attention to issues of equity and services sensitive to the needs of marginalised groups including: low and no income elderly; Indigenous elderly; women; LGBTQI+ elderly; and those with complex health needs (Daly and Armstrong, 2016). In response to these needs and issues, research on aged care has grown rapidly in the last decades. Social workers have been an important part of this research, adding their unique perspective of social justice, policy change and direct services (Baines and Armstrong, 2015; Hughes, 2007; Hulko et al., 2017). These studies employ a number of methodologies, perspectives, policies and practice approaches. Reflecting the social work ethic of equity and fairness, most of these projects not only study aging and care, they also engage with strategies for positive change. The complexity of the care relationship is a common theme across most of this research, and a growing recognition that the conditions of work and the conditions of care and vice-versa. This involves not only tensions between unpaid familial and paid formal care, but often takes place in the 'liminal' spaces between them where volunteers, student interns and care workers in the informal or grey economy work alongside family members and paid care professionals (Daly and Armstrong, 2016).

Though the conditions and ethos of aging differ significantly from country to country, certain commonalities exist, including the growing marketisation of care, the positioning of service users as consumers rather than rights-bearing citizens, a shift to individualised funding of services, rather than block funding of care organisations, and increased reliance on

migrant care workers to fill care gaps (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg, 2012; Meagher et al., 2016). In this rapidly changing context, we have much to learn from the initiatives and promising practices from a number of jurisdictions and comparative analyses can provide important insights into ways to improve care.

The papers in this Special Issue were first presented at an international Symposium to promote critical reflection on issues facing social workers and other care workers in the field of aging, organised jointly by the Graduate Institute of Social Work, National Chengchi University, Taiwan and Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney, Australia. The symposium invited papers addressing any aspects of: approaches to care for the elderly; finance and ownership of care services; accountability; work organisation; social work education on aging; and/or policy implications. Professor Sheila Neysmith (emeritus) provided the keynote address which forms the first article in this Special Issue. Drawing on community activism and research undertaken by and with older people in Toronto, this address challenges the field to remain based in the lived experience of older people, rather than in solutions that fit with private market solutions and a denigration of the complexity of the experience of aging in this period of late neoliberalism.

The subsequent articles critically engage with policy, practice and social work education in the area of care and aging. Regrettably, this journal does not have the capacity for bi-lingual publication, hence the papers represent a strong cross-section of the papers presented in English at the conference, but none of the valuable contributions provided in Mandarin. The articles invite the reader to critically reflect on the issues raised in this introduction and to use our insights to extend social justice in this area of growing importance and urgency.

References

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