BOOK REVIEW

Gail Mountain. *Occupational therapy and the vulnerable elderly*. Whurr Publishers Ltd, London. 2004 (August). ISBN 1 861 56 376 0. Paperback, 250 pp. Price £25.00

The author of the book, Gail Mountain, head of Health and Social Care research at Sheffield Hallam University, is a well-known researcher in the field of rehabilitation of older people.

The aim of the book is to describe the world of older people living in the UK at the beginning of the 21st century, and to describe appropriate research and practice for occupational therapy responses to those older people. This is also of interest to physiotherapists across the globe. The reference to available research and practice literature serves to objectify the view expressed by the author and helps to indicate where therapists should direct their efforts in order to increase effectiveness. It is a reflection of current and future practice in light of current and anticipated demand. The majority of health and social workers will find themselves working with older people at one point during their career.

The book consists of 11 chapters. Each chapter ends with implications for therapy, except for the last chapter. The last part of the book consists of 25 pages of references, appendices referring to studies where older people are cited, methodological underpinning, a list of relevant organisations, networks, sources of advice and index.

The first chapter, “Older people in society”, contains information about the definition of older people. People between 50 and 100 (plus) years old are categorized as older people, thus incorporating a diverse population of several generations. Chapter 2, “Growing older: an individual experience”, considers the individual experiences of older people in our society, putting the policies and initiatives described in chapter 1 into a personal context. Theories and research concerning quality of life are mentioned. Chapter 3, “Triggers to vulnerability”, considers the range of health and associated needs that can emerge in old age. The interaction between illness and/or disability, environment and quality of life is presented as the heart of therapy practice with older people. I think most professionals agree with reference to their own professions. The perspective in chapter 4, “Older people and informal care”, draws upon a range of policies and sociological literature to explore the informal care provided to older people. There are a number of determinant factors that affects the nature of service to meet the demand discussed in chapter 5, where the author describes the historical and current context within which services for older people operate. The multi-disciplinary focus and good integration between hospital and community services are stressed. The range of rehabilitative service is covered in eight domains. Standardized assessments are argued for, referring to reliability, validity and sensitivity. The reader is presented with a list of standardized measures, examples are: Barthel Index, Crichton Royal Behaviour Rating Scale, Camberwell Assessment for older people, General Health Questionnaire, Philadelphia Geriatric Moral Scale, Assessment of Motor and Process Skills (AMPS) and Community Dependency. Chapter 7 and 8 considered occupational therapy interventions that can help older people to maintain and regain their health and independence. Chapter 9 stresses the occupational therapy contribution within the service context, i.e. primary care, specialist services – secondary care, day services, housing services, voluntary sector, social services, intermediate care services, specialist services – and acute care. We have information about rehabilitation services for specific user groups and accidents as well as emergency services, day provision, social services, residential and nursing care, and intermediate care. Chapter 10 focuses on using and generating evidence to support practice. The last chapter, “Working with older people: the challenges for occupational therapy”, identifies nine key principles that should underpin all occupational therapy intervention with older people, and the service within which those interventions are delivered.

Having finished reading this book, it appears that all readers who are health workers are within its target group. It is an interesting book to read and it places health work for older people in perspective. The ideas presented are good and the approaches many. However, in general, not much is new. The referencing style leads to many repetitions. Some topics that are raised could be more fully discussed. A few definitions are missing and some references made with little synthesis. There are sections that
lack a deeper analysis. According to the author, the book is intended for occupational therapists. In my opinion, the book is general enough to provide an overview for anyone who works with older people within the health and social services, and may stimulate further in-depth reading of the topics presented. On the whole, the book creates a good identity for people working with older people. It is easily read and easy to follow. I am sure it will be an inspiration to all people working with older people.

Astrid Bergland
Head Research and Development
Oslo University College
Faculty of Health Science
Box 4, St. Olavs Plass
0130, Oslo
Norway