

EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE WITH OLDER ADULTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The field of social work has yet to reach a consensus about the meaning of evidence based practice (EBP). However, there is widespread agreement that practice that is evidenced based is far preferable to what some refer to as opinion based practice. In this and in future issues of SBW Notes we shall report on some of the best available research findings in the field of aging and their implications for practice. This issue addresses our work with older adults and their families.

Over the past 50 years there has been a growing body of research findings that show extensive dynamic transactions among three and four generation families including the very old. Based on these findings, gerontologists have advocated for a broader view of the family that addresses the needs of adults in terms of not only their role as parents, but also their role in relation to their own parents.* In the 1960's social work researcher Margaret Blenkner questioned the profession's absorption with the "isolated nuclear family" in its programs and practice. She rallied social workers to provide help to middle age adult children as they faced a developmental stage she dubbed the "filial crisis" brought on by the increased dependence of their aging parents.

Since the 1960's family care giving across the generations became widely recognized thanks to an overwhelming body of evidence that the bulk of care provided to older adults came from family members. The social work profession's focus on the "isolated nuclear family" was presumably laid to rest. Today, however, a dichotomy in our work with the extended family still exists. Many social service agencies serve either the young family or the older family. Their programs provide a framework for social work practice that does not encompass the extended family in the face of evidence to the contrary.

It is heartening that many aging programs sponsor intergenerational programs and provide support for family caregivers. Also laudatory are initiatives to provide support to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. The New Age of Aging Initiative of the Alliance for Children and Families - the umbrella organization for over 370 family services agencies nationwide - holds enormous promise for breaking down the generational divide. Efforts such as these demonstrate the benefits to individuals and families when programs and interventions are evidence-based.

*Blenkner, M. (1965). "Social Work and Family Relationships in Later Life with Some Thoughts on Filial Maturity." In *Social Structure and the Family: Generational Relations*, ed. E. Shanas and G.F. Streib. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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MEET OUR NEW ASSOCIATE



Roslyn H. Chernesky, DSW, ACSW, has been Professor at the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service since 1981 where she designed the administration curriculum and teaches courses in management, supervision, community organization, program and proposal development, program evaluation, and organizational theory. She was a Gerontological Society of America Post-Doctoral Fellow in 1989, received the Career Achievement Award of the Association of Community Organization and Social Administration in 2002, and currently is Faculty Research Scholar at Fordham's Ravazzin Center on Aging. Articles from Ravazzin Center projects appear in the *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, *Educational Gerontology*, *Families in Society*, and *International Social Work* on topics including students' interest in working with older adults, assessing the service needs of seniors, family elder caregiving as a service niche, grantmaker support for aging and to caregivers of families with Alzheimer's disease." Roslyn provides consultation as an evaluator and trainer in the public and private sectors. Her work spans the fields of aging, HIV/AIDS, child welfare, and substance abuse and she has publications on women and management, case management, staff retention, and managing multicultural agencies. Dr. Chernesky received her master's degree from the University of Pittsburgh and her doctorate from CUNY.

We look forward to your comments and experiences.

SBW Partners is a fee-for-service firm devoted to advancing social work practice in aging. Services are provided by Dr. Barbara Silverstone and Dr. Ann Burack-Weiss, the firm's founding partners, and a group of associates. For more information, please visit www.sbwpartners.com or call 212.337.2555.