

Grey Matters: A Guide to Collaborative Research with Seniors. Nancy Marlett, Claudia Emes (Eds.), Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2010. 325 pp. ISBN-10: 1552382516.

This book is a long anticipated and welcome contribution to literature on working with older adults on research teams. It arises out of approximately a decade of experience at the Kerby Centre of Excellence and an internationally recognized research funded by a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Aging pilot grant in 2003-2004. The authors of this excellent guide, published in 2010, are, in my opinion, at least ten years ahead of their time.

The authors, Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes, are exceptionally well-qualified to offer suggestions to diverse audiences about how to collaborate successfully. While both authors have considerable academic qualifications, they bring much more to this publication than their degrees. What distinguishes these authors is their lifetime of mentoring and collaborating. Their helpful suggestions on how to engage in collaborative research with older adults are persuasive because they arise out of experience in the field.

The material in the book is presented in a logical and accessible style and organization. The opening chapters present a rationale for creating this manual. The authors cogently argue that research has often overlooked the interests of older adults; the research questions that older adults consider important have often not been addressed by academics. Consequently, many areas of potentially important research have been neglected. This neglect has had a profoundly negative impact on our health care system because we have excluded individuals, older adults, who have traditionally been considered “non-experts.” This manual is needed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Canadian health care system.

The next chapters provide detailed and important information about four methods: field work, interviews and questionnaires, focus groups, and narrative methods. This readily understood summary of research skills will be particularly helpful for beginning researchers. However, the added value of this book lies in the authors’ passion for conducting collaborative research with seniors in authentic ways. The reader will be left knowing that this way of doing research must be embraced more frequently and that this Canadian group has indeed found ways that we can use to make collaborative research work.

The final chapters focus on the steps in research: getting all members of the research team, including older adults, ready to conduct a research project; writing a research proposal that reflects the older adults’ perspectives; and finally conducting the research, again with older adults, and disseminating the findings to multiple audiences, including other older adults, students, educators, researchers, and policy makers. By conducting research in the ways described in this volume, researchers may influence decisions related to both how health care is delivered and what health care services are funded.

The content of this book will be relevant to various agencies focusing on aging and health, such as Vancouver Island Health Authority, which has made a strong commitment

to including older adults as equal partners in research projects. The content of *Grey Matters* indicates that we, at Island Health, are on the right track. Because Vancouver Island is a retirement destination, we strategically focus on research with older adults. For some time now, we have had systematic processes in place to have older adults gather qualitative data from older adults to identify what is important to them about their care.

Preparing anyone to make a meaningful contribution to the research process requires considerable time, which busy people, including older adults, do not have. Marlett and Emes are to be encouraged to consider adjusting their model, or to consider a second model that speaks to seniors who could play an equally important but less time-consuming role. I think it is time for a sequel to this book that could address the supports in academia and in the community that are needed to encourage further collaborative research with older adults. Without those important supports, this wonderful way of doing research, I would argue, may not lead to improvements in effectiveness and efficiency.

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