BOOK REVIEWS

The Validation Breakthrough: Simple Techniques for Communicating with People with Alzheimer’s and Other Dementias

Feil N, de Klerk-Rubin V. Baltimore, MD: Health Professions Press, 2012; 294 pp, US $34.95

Persons with Alzheimer’s have various levels of abilities. Often the professional or family members are confused by the person’s actions. A variety of modalities have emerged over the last 30 years to assist professionals and family members with issues ranging from reminiscence, to life review, reality orientation, and psychotherapy (see Chapter 9). Validation therapy (1993) emerged during this period of confusion in terms of understanding the abilities of the person with Alzheimer’s. The text was ground-breaking in its first edition since it provided a framework that acknowledges the person’s abilities, not the condition. “Validation is a theory, method, and an attitude. You may have the validating attitude-acceptance and respecting the old person where they are…” (Feil & Klerk-Rubin, 2012, p. 216) This current third edition of the text places the person with Alzheimer’s at the centre of understanding. It accepts the person and the behaviour at the given moment.

The text frames its discourse within the person’s abilities with Alzheimer’s (Chapter 1), describes what is validation and illustrates how the four stages of validation are applied (Chapter 2). The third edition of the text builds upon the insights gained from the application of the process using case studies (Chapters 3 to 6) and validation with early onset of Alzheimer’s (Chapter 7), indicating who benefits from validation (Chapter 8) and how validation differs from other modalities (Chapter 9), showing validation in practice (Chapters 10 to 14), and providing examples of group validation (Chapter 15) and testimonials of practitioners (Appendix).

The research in working with persons with Alzheimer’s has emerged during the last 20 years since validation (1993) provided an alternative perspective from modalities provided during the 1990s. Using evidence-based research, research centres such as the Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program (MAREP) at the University of Waterloo have provided insights on how the condition of Alzheimer’s has impacted on the person, family and professionals. The Gerontological Society of America published a monograph “Communicating With Older Adults: An Evidence-Based Review of What Really Works” (2012). This document as well as research being generated at centres on aging such as MAREP would complement this text. The Validation Breakthrough: Simple Techniques for Communicating with People with Alzheimer’s and Other Dementias would be useful as a supplemental text for students and professionals in understanding the abilities of persons with Alzheimer’s.

 Jerome F. Singleton, PhD, CTRS
Professor, Recreation and Leisure Studies, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS

Connecting with Socially Isolated Seniors: A Service Provider’s Guide


This text is a guide for working with older adults who may reside in a supportive housing environment. Osage and McCall (2012), a practitioner and a researcher, blend their knowledge to provide insights into a study conducted over a two-year period on Satellite Housing in the United States. The sample was comprised of Spanish, English and Chinese residents. The authors defined “socially isolated” as those individuals who usually stayed in their apartments.

Chapter 1 and the preface frame how the study was conducted as well as the concept of Aging in Place. Chapter 2 reminds professionals to place themselves in the shoes of the people they will be working with. The authors provide the reader with a risk factor checklist for social isolation. In Chapters 3 to 13, they provide findings of their study that frame the discussion related to the potential risk factors for social isolation. Each chapter provides the reader with tips on how to help in regard to the potential risk factors that may lead to “social isolation”: Health and Disabilities; Alzheimer’s Disease and Cognitive Health; Intimate Partnerships; Gender; and Language and Culture, among others. Chapter 14 provides insights into potential ideas for action ranging from civic engagement to the role of technology in being connected to others. Chapter 15 reminds the professional: to be diligent; to empower seniors to maintain their sense of control; and that participatory planning assists in empowering the participant.

The text is a guide based upon research generated through collaboration between a researcher and a practitioner. Each chapter links research and the findings of the study to a story of a participant, and provides suggestions that could be translated into practice.

The premise of the research and practice guidelines was, in the reviewer’s estimation, to focus on empowering the person residing in supportive housing to maintain control of their ability to make decisions. This reflects the authors’ practice and research philosophies to understand the person first. The authors may wish in future to consider elaborating on how applied research empowers the professional and the person being studied. The guide could be used by students, practitioners and researchers in enhancing knowledge translation from theory to practice based on a person-centered approach.

 Jerome F. Singleton, PhD, CTRS
Professor, Recreation and Leisure Studies, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS