



## Introduction

It is now more than a decade since the enactment of community care policies had such a huge impact on the practice of social work with older people in Britain. Although some full length books were produced on the subject of social work with older people in the years immediately following the implementation of these policies (Hughes, 1995; Marshall and Dixon, 1996; Thompson, 1995), since the mid-1990s there has been relatively little produced in book form to examine how practice has developed. This represents a critical gap in the literature, given that the speed of organisational change with which social workers have been confronted has fundamentally altered the context and nature of practice. While the above texts do have their strengths – notably in the practice focus of each – none of them are remotely up to date as regards their policy relevance.

For example, the ambiguities that have characterised the development of care management – the model within which most practice is now framed – are little evident here, although they have been passionately argued in more contemporary literature (Carey, 2003; Postle, 2002). Similarly, all the standard books were written during the latter days of the Conservative administration, and therefore obviously could not be expected to address the issues that have become characteristic of ‘new’ Labour, even though one of the authors (Beverley Hughes) actually became a minister in that government. There is relatively little about partnership and collaboration, key watchwords within the ‘modernisation agenda’ of ‘new’ Labour. Similarly, there could be no recognition of the dramatic changes that have been wrought to the health and social care landscape by such developments as Primary Care Trusts, the single assessment process, intermediate care, legislation to avoid delayed hospital discharge, etc. As a result, while the existing literature on social work with older people remains useful, it is no longer sufficiently up to date to warrant detailed examination.

The paucity of literature on social work with older people in the British context is marked, particularly in comparison with the veritable flood of books that focus on various aspects of social work with children. In addition, there is a limited critical edge to the literature; most of it has featured a strong practice focus rather than

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a more analytical approach. While this is undoubtedly useful, it often does not help to understand the complexities that underpin the way social work with older people is organised, or the policy decisions that have had such a profound impact on practice. While this is not the case internationally, the way in which social work with older people has been depicted in the British literature has tended to take a one-dimensional view of what social work is, ignoring the more radical and collectivist approaches that have been developed in other areas of practice. In addition, this literature tends to over-simplify the complexities that will inevitably emerge in practice, while also failing to provide a coherent account of the policy and organisational context within which practice is carried out.

An element of authorial arrogance is perhaps necessary at this point, as I claim that (of course!) this book avoids these pitfalls. Certainly, some of the ground that this book covers will be familiar to those readers who are acquainted with the field. In other respects this book can claim to address issues that are not featured in the existing literature. For example, in exploring the history and development of social work in Britain it problematises the essential nature of the occupation, which is often taken for granted. Drawing particularly on the work of Payne (1996), the book identifies three distinctly different strands of social work theory and action, which have been termed the 'individualistic-therapeutic', 'administrative' and 'collectivist' orientations to practice. It argues that while these strands have been powerful within social work at different times in its development, there is little evidence that 'collectivist' ways of thinking have ever had a particular hold in work with older people. In addition, while models of social work practice drawing on an 'individualist-therapeutic' tradition were powerfully drawn in the immediate post-war era, these had relatively little purchase on actual work with older people, which has been strongly directed by administrative requirements, an orientation that is particularly evident in the post-community care world (Lymbery, 1998a; Sturges, 1996). This has created a climate of practice which can often be experienced as arid and unfulfilling by practitioners, bearing relatively little relation to the genuine needs or desires of older people.

In this context it can be hard to retain enthusiasm for the potential of social work to become more relevant to older people's needs. However, as the economic and social position of older people appears to deteriorate – a situation made more complicated by the recognition of an impending crisis regarding the income of older people in the near future (as reported in *The Guardian*, 13.10.2004) – the role of social work in upholding their value as individuals, in responding to their needs, wishes and desires, and in mediating between them and the large societal institutions to which they will increasingly require access, should become more important rather than less. The book is therefore written in a spirit of optimism, seeking to challenge the reductive assumptions that have limited the scope of social work to respond more positively to older people's needs. At the same time, it seeks to temper the idealism of this premise by

identifying the realities within which practice is presently framed (Lymbery and Butler, 2004). Change cannot come into being if these realities are simply ignored, or alternatively accorded little significance, as they have served to limit the scope of what can be achieved in practice.

With the balance between idealism and reality firmly in mind, the book is subdivided into three parts. Part I examines the context within which social work practice for older people should be examined. This section focuses on two critical issues, the place of older people in society and the development of the occupation of social work. A book that attempts to link the two themes – as this book obviously does – needs to be clear about the nature of what is discussed. Chapter 1 therefore explores the position of older people in society, examining key issues such as demographic and population change, different ways of understanding the ageing process, and the range of needs that older people might have that call for social work involvement. This is framed within a discourse of ageism, the argument being that the pervasive nature of ageism within British society serves both as a major cause of the disadvantaged position occupied by many older people, and an obstacle to resolving the discrimination that is consequently experienced. The chapter accepts that many older people never require the support of social workers, but observes that they are often in a position of emotional and physical frailty when they do.

Chapter 2 examines the history and development of social work in general terms, on the basis that this has had a major impact on the way in which all social problems are conceptualised and hence the practice response to those problems. It identifies three broad streams of thought within social work since its inception. Drawing on the ideals of the Charity Organisation Society (COS), one major theme has been the development of individual casework – initially seen as a means of putting the social theory of the COS into action, and later seen as an approach that potentially unified social work in all of its many guises. Also deriving partly from the work of the COS as well as from nineteenth century Poor Law officers, the second stream is one of social work as an element of social administration: this could be seen in much of the work of hospital almoners, and remains a feature of much contemporary social work with older people. The third stream is of social work as a form of social action, largely stemming from the work of the Settlement Movement in the nineteenth century, but which could also be readily seen in the radical social work movement of the 1970s as well as in community development, which also reached its peak at the same time. The chapter argues that these three elements can still be perceived in contemporary social work, and identifies them as the ‘individualist-therapeutic’, ‘administrative’ and ‘collectivist’ approaches to practice. While these elements have all been particularly powerful at different times, the chapter concludes that social work with older people has been dominated by an administratively-oriented approach (a theme expanded in more detail in Chapter 6).

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Part II examines the key dimensions of policy that frame the development of social work with older people, with three chapters exploring this in more detail. Chapter 3 examines the development of community care policy in the years since the end of the Second World War. Three main themes are drawn out in this process. First, the chapter explores health and social care policy, with a particular focus on the boundaries between the two as these have been an ongoing problem in the development of policy. Secondly, it looks at the implications of the dominance of residential care in the policy response to the needs of older people. Finally, it moves on to reflect on the origins and development of community care policy, before considering how this has changed since the 'new' Labour government came to power in 1997. This overall review of policy leads to the themes discussed in the following two chapters.

Chapter 4 examines the policy emphasis given by 'new' Labour to the concepts of partnership and collaboration, which has ensured that the development of effective systems of multi-disciplinary and inter-professional working are at the core of policies for the health and social care of older people. Starting from a consideration of the nature of collaboration, the chapter moves on to discuss the place of professional groups in the delivery of health and social care, before examining how differences in power and status can create obstacles to effective collaborative working. These are then examined at three different levels – the 'structural/organisational', the 'professional/cultural' and the 'interpersonal'. From this analysis the chapter concludes by identifying ways in which these obstacles can be transcended to establish effective collaborative working, which is described as being the 'holy grail' of current policy.

On the basis that effective collaborative working between social work and health care is the most important axis in these developments, Chapter 5 explores the historical connections between the two, drawing on material throughout social work's lengthy history. In examining texts that focus on the place of social work within health settings – particularly hospitals – the chapter identifies that social workers have always had to struggle to gain acceptance for the value and independence of their work, being routinely subjected to attempts from outside to gain control over the nature and content of their practice. In addition, the chapter argues that social workers have often had to act in accordance with priorities established by others, often forcing practice into a primarily 'administrative' frame of reference. Although a somewhat more positive role has been identified for social workers within primary health care, the chapter points out that this method of organisation is far from the norm; in addition, it notes that the possibility of a more widespread adoption of this model of organisation is therefore uncertain. The chapter moves on to explore ways in which social work has had an impact on health care policies and practice, concluding with a summary of the main ways in which a social worker could have a positive impact within a multi-disciplinary environment.

The final part of the book examines the developing nature of social work practice with older people. Chapter 6 forms a bridge between the first two parts and the final chapters, by exploring the history and development of social work practice with older people, on the basis that a proper understanding of this is a pre-condition of a fuller understanding of contemporary developments. The chapter addresses the reality that social work with older people has always been a less well developed area of practice, a situation that the community care reforms did not alter, even through the needs of older people have been accorded a much higher priority than before. It argues that the administrative dominance of models of care management has in fact served to maintain the relatively low status of this aspect of work. By contrast, the chapter identifies the range of values, skills and knowledge that would be needed to work successfully with older people, drawing on a full range of social work theories and methods, and argues that a change in the way in which social work with older people is conceived could yield benefits both for service users and for social work practitioners.

The final three chapters each focus on a core issue in the organisation of a service response to the needs of older people. The chapters seek to provide practical support and guidance to social workers working within the areas of assessment, care management and intermediate care. Chapter 7 examines the central place of assessment in social work with older people. As with all aspects of social work, the act of assessment is acknowledged as being the foundation of good practice; however, the chapter argues that the exigencies of policy development in community care have created an assessment role where priority is given to carrying out the task as quickly as possible, without exploring individuals' circumstances in depth. This has led to practice that is unfulfilling for social workers, and unsatisfactory for service users. The chapter also explores the implications of two major policy developments that are being enacted in parallel – the policy to reduce delayed discharges from hospital care, and the development of a single assessment process. The themes that have been raised in the chapter are then addressed through the medium of an extended practice scenario, which gives an indication of the complexity of assessment work in practice.

Practice scenarios are also used to illustrate the practice themes in both Chapter 8 and Chapter 9. Chapter 8 explores the development of care management, one of the most significant features of social work practice in community care. Its origins in the United States are charted, along with the establishment of care management pilot projects in Britain in the 1980s. The chapter identifies the critical fact that the model of care management that has been developed under community care differs in many key respects from the projects from which it emerged, particularly in the targeted nature of the populations originally served by care management and the requirement for well developed social work skills in the performance of care management duties. By contrast, the model of care management that has come to dominate for older people has become a bulk

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service for large numbers of people, where highly developed social work skills are almost an irrelevance to the success of policy. The chapter argues that a more imaginative response to the needs of older people is possible, and outlines organisational arrangements that might help to bring such change about. The themes of the chapter are then brought together in a practice scenario, which focuses on the extent to which timely, sensitive, skilled social work interventions can make a genuine difference to the lives of service users and carers.

Chapter 9 concentrates on the role of social work in relation to the development of intermediate care, one of the major policy priorities in health and social care for older people. The chapter outlines the genesis of intermediate care, focusing particularly on the wealth of small projects that sought to rehabilitate older people. It illustrates how these individual projects coalesced into the overarching framework of 'intermediate care', despite the fact that the evidence base that should theoretically have demonstrated the effectiveness of particular forms of service provision was relatively sketchy. The chapter goes on to discuss the role of social work within the provision of intermediate care. It suggests that a clear analysis of the role of social work in helping older people recover their capacity to live independently has not yet been undertaken, despite the plethora of research which focuses on the occupational roles of therapists in the process. The chapter seeks to rectify this omission by identifying how a social worker can play a major creative role in the provision of intermediate care through a combination of the three main dimensions of social work activities. As in the previous two chapters, the dimensions of this work are illustrated through a detailed practice scenario, which outlines the way in which a social worker can contribute to the intermediate care process in both residential and community settings.

Three explanatory notes are important at this point. The first is that while the book focuses on social work practice in the British context – and seeks to have a broader relevance to practice on an international level – the particular policy and legal context to which it refers is essentially that of England. The reality of the last few years has been a gradual divergence of both law and policy within Britain. The implementation of the *Royal Commission on Long Term Care* (Sutherland Report, 1999) is a case in point; although it was decided not to implement the recommendation of free personal care in England, the opposite decision was taken in Scotland (see Chapter 3), thereby creating a clear policy divergence with major long-term implications. As a result, therefore, an author has to balance the competing demands of establishing an argument that is grounded in a clearly defined policy and legal context with the requirement to make the text as broadly applicable as possible. It is hoped that the specificity of the former does not detract from the wider applicability of the argument to other policy and legal contexts.

The second point relates to the practice scenarios, and the role they play within the text. As the above chapter summaries indicate, these scenarios have been devised to highlight the general issues produced in the preceding discussion. Inevitably, this has meant that some issues have been highlighted and others have been less developed. It is not the intention of the practice scenarios to engage with all the issues that will confront social workers in day-to-day practice. For example, none of them throw up issues of abuse, a major concern for social workers with older people in the context of *No Secrets* (DoH, 2000a). In addition, none of the three practice scenarios generate issues relating to Black or Asian service users: certainly, the dynamics of the issues generated would have been different had this been the case. Their purpose is rather to illustrate important themes in practice, rather than encapsulate all of the possible issues with which a social worker will engage. The patterns of critical reflection that they encourage should be transferable to other situations encountered throughout practice.

The third point refers to other ways in which the text has been worked upon with the intention of making it more comprehensible for its readership. Each chapter contains a summary of the main issues to have emerged from its content; in addition, most separate sections within chapters also feature a boxed summary of the main learning points. Within Chapter 4, the various precepts for successful collaborative working are also illustrated through a practice example drawn closely from the author's own research (Lymbery and Millward, 2000, 2001). The aim of this example, as with the practice scenarios mentioned above, is to ground the analytical debate in genuine practical applications.

