

Book review

How to Handle Later Life

Edited by Marion Shoard
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How to Handle Later Life aims to provide comprehensive, relevant and accessible information to enable those approaching later life, and interested others, to successfully navigate the experiences and challenges that may be encountered. The book is intended to do the legwork for readers, simplifying access to key information on numerous issues. Following on from Shoard's (2004) previous publication *A Survival Guide to Later Life*, this longer, more substantial, self-help book makes available an impressive 1,143 pages of material. Designed as a reference book to dip in and out of, the scope and length need not worry you.

The content is both extensive and diverse with 12 sections comprising 41 chapters. Part 1, "growing older", is intended for all to peruse; this section sets the foundation for the rest of the book and includes chapters on the ageing body; food, drink and temperature; physical activity; and psychological well-being. Following this opening section, the subsequent 11 parts focus on topics that Shoard invites you to "hop, skip and jump [...] around" (p. 3) – to be examined as and when required.

Early sections deliver an abundance of information. The housing part covers the decision to move or not and the role of sheltered or retirement housing or villages. Advice is varied, including to try a stair-lift out before you buy one and to use worn alarm pendants rather than fixed versions. A section on connections examines closely relationships and communication in later life, exploring group activities, use of computers and the internet and the role of animals.

The following two sections cover the world of healthcare and healthcare provision. The National Health Service and provision for

strokes, anxiety/depression, falls, continence and dementia are all explored. Shoard goes on to consider practical help such as, equipment, telecare, human help and live-in care and help from the council encompassing social care, assessments, support for carers and organising and paying for care and support. Turning her attention to maintaining the ability to go out and about, Shoard provides content on the legal requirements of organisations and offers multiple tips to maximise independence in later life.

Later sections offer material on the roles of representatives and advisors such as, powers of attorney, deputies, guardians, advisors and advocates. Money matters are examined including universal state benefits, means tested benefits, earning, investing and bestowing. Final chapters make explicit aspects to be considered when staying in and leaving hospitals and at the end of life. Cross-referencing is prevalent throughout the book and a convenient glossary is provided. A list of "useful contacts" is present as a last hurrah for readers to obtain information from other sources.

This ambitious, large-scale book is the culmination of many years of dedicated work, starting as a result of Shoard herself traversing the complex arena of eldercare for her mother. It offers a wealth of information to guide older people and their relatives. While this work is a desirable, detailed, practical and common sense addition to the self-help literature focussed on older age, it will have limited applicability for those outside of the UK context. Additionally, much of the content, rather than standing the test of time, is likely to require regular updates as systems, organisations and policies change.

Despite these limits to wider relevance, Shoard appears to have largely met her brief, delivering a comprehensive, accomplished resource, a plethora of knowledge, which is likely to allow those approaching, or in, later life and their loved ones to deal with the complex systems of care, housing, hospitals and finances, as well as maximising the

positive aspects of life and well-being at this stage of their lives. The sizeable book is accessible, due to its clear writing style and easy navigation, with sections and chapters complemented with useful summaries and all locatable via blue page markers. Readers of this work are likely to develop an increased understanding and awareness of issues of later life, which as Shoard writes is “a world of endless inter-connections” (p. xiii).

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Reference

Shoard, M. (2004), *A Survival Guide to Later Life* (*Daily Telegraph*), Robinson, London.