

Preface



Linda G. Dumas, PhD, RN, ANP-BC
Guest Editor

“Illness is the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.”

—Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

I wish to thank the *Nursing Clinics of North America* for the privilege of editing an issue on long-term care. Fifteen years ago I edited a *Clinics* issue on community that included an article on long-term care. I recall not knowing much about long-term care. The social contexts of illness and aging were very different at that time. There were no aging baby boomers driving the demographics in a changing society. There was no economic crisis. In the 1990s, long-term care would not become a focal point for any analysis of the health care system. In 2009, it is a new millennium. Understanding long-term care is foremost in the curricula of medical and nursing students and is at the top of the list in policy think tanks. In 1998, I became an adult nurse practitioner in long-term care. I have been witness to the unfolding of a new paradigm. As chronic illness and longer life spans have changed the faces of aging, so have a broad array of issues around quality of life and illness at the end of life.

By profession, I am a nurse educator. Advanced practice with nursing home residents is my passion. I am grateful for the opportunity to integrate into this issue some of the important issues driving long-term care in the twenty-first century. Long-term care is a continuum that crosses many age groups, illnesses, and settings. It is chronic illness and a series of exacerbations and remissions in men, women, and children of all ages and any setting. Long-term care is old age, relentless in the toll it takes on the frail. It is children who live with chronic illness and lifelong disability. Long-term care is a journey rather than a series of discrete events.

The focus of this issue is on long-term care and older adults in the community and in nursing homes. Some of the articles focus on the general community and others on the nursing home. My initial objective in putting together a sequence of articles on older adults was to elucidate the issues, raise questions, and diminish the stigma that becomes part of one's identity in chronic illness. A second objective was to integrate

the “voices” of diverse experts in the field of aging and long-term care. A third objective was to build the concept of “community” into all long-term care settings. Long-term care is an example of Susan Sontag’s “other place.”

I am fortunate to have best practice contributors to this issue—a physician from the renowned Cleveland Clinic, a home care nurse executive who is director of a home and hospice organization and home care nurses, a hospital chaplain, a nursing professor emeritus, a senior nurse researcher working for the AARP in Washington, a journalist who has dedicated her work to Alzheimer’s caregivers, a former inaugural fellow who recently left Washington to return to teaching at the University of Kentucky in Louisville, and a geriatrician who is an expert in palliative and hospice care. All bring a deep and tireless commitment to the care of older adults. I extend my thanks to each contributor for the thoughtful articles and good work. I also thank Clinics Editor Katie Hartner for her patience and kindness. Finally, my deep appreciation and thanks go to Bettina Elliott, my assistant for the Clinics project. Your expertise and support have been invaluable for many years.

This issue covers a lot of territory. It is always difficult to make choices about what to include in a journal with finite pages. This issue can best be described as eclectic. It has gone through many adaptations over the past 6 months. The contributors address some of the many challenges to long-term care in the twenty-first century. Part I presents an overview of the broad societal issues that significantly influence the directions of long-term care. In their discussion of the nursing workforce, Drs. Susan Reinhard and Heather Young present an articulate and informative overview of issues such as the nursing shortage, the aging of the population, the aging of practicing nurses, the aging of nurse educators, and the new demographics that so much influence all older adults. A second article analyzes the nursing workforce from a different perspective by describing the nursing shortage and concerns about long-term care, recruiting, and retaining diverse and underrepresented nursing students to the profession. Two programs are described that have been supported by HRSA grants since 2003. A compelling challenge to nursing and to health care is how to remedy the shortage of diverse registered nurses in nursing homes and how to graduate more underrepresented nurses with baccalaureate degrees who will bring us closer to addressing long-term care disparities and look forward to working in nursing home settings. A third article focuses on a discussion of long-term care disparities by Dr. Barbara Messinger-Rapport. She brings real life to the numbers through cases and strong detail. Until now, there has been limited discussion of the financial, social, and treatment inequities in nursing homes.

Part II addresses some of the clinical challenges in long-term care, keeping the focus on nursing homes. The first article by Drs. Messinger-Rapport and Dumas is an epidemiologic discussion of resident falls in nursing homes including causes, interventions, and outcomes. The second article by Drs. Dumas and Ramadurai overviews clinical problems through case analyses in the most vulnerable elderly nursing home residents. The final two articles are the “voices” of advocates, of caregivers, and of a hospital chaplain who worked in hospice for a long time. There is a spirituality in the voice of Reverend Beth Loomis as she overviews the difficult choices that families and patients must make. She guides the families through the darkest of times. The caregiver voices are those of two women, one the daughter and the second the wife of a person with advanced Alzheimer’s disease. The stories of their journeys with loved ones are compelling.

In Part III, Meg Doherty, a nurse executive director of a successful home care and hospice association, describes and analyzes the organizational challenges these organizations face as long-term care becomes a dominant force in a broken health

care system. A second article in this section is written by Dr. Fran Portnoy, a sociologist professor and expert in long-term care. She writes of her family through the generations as they face the challenges of aging. Now retired, she writes poignantly of the life changing experiences that accompany growing old. Drs. Susan Reinhard and Karen Robinson conclude Part III by looking ahead to the next 50 years. They write of the need for “more effective chronic care and more humane long-term care.” This is a timely article in the midst of economic and social crises that are unparalleled in history.

In 2009, the state of the economy, foreclosures, huge bailouts, and devastating job losses demand all of Washington’s attention. Emergency measures by Congress affect families of the chronically ill who are young and old. Nursing homes and other care facilities are affected as budgets and staff are cut. The problems in our nation divert attention from a health care system that needs to be fixed. We will continue to promote advocacy and change and humane policies. We will look to nursing leadership in chronic care as we have never before.

Again, I thank the diverse contributors to this work. I hope readers complete their reading of this Clinics issue on long-term care with a better understanding of the connections or links between the institutions and the patients, the residents, the health care providers, and all others who advocate for the vulnerable populations who profile the many faces of chronic illness, people who are “citizens of that other place.”

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