

Book Review

M Robinson, Novelli A, Pearson C, Norris L, eds.

Global Health and Global Aging

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2007.

Global demographic transformation in the 21st century will most likely be characterized by population aging. In 2006, 11 percent of the world's population was 65 years or older. This number is expected to reach 22 percent (nearly two billion people) by 2050. *Global Health and Global Aging* is a comprehensive report that offers diverse positions and perspectives from 41 international experts, and a thought-provoking foreword by Robert N. Butler, MD, a leading authority on aging and President and CEO of International Longevity Center - USA.

The book is organized into five major sections.

Part One, *The World and Its Aging Population*, presents an overview of the topic, including a global synopsis of demographic trends and a discussion of international policies and institutional leadership challenges affecting the aging population.

Part Two, *Countries with High Rates of Longevity*, highlights the opportunities and successes of countries with record high rates of longevity. Chapter 8, by Pekka Puska, the director general of the National Public Health Institute of Finland (KTL), describes well-planned actions in Finland that had a positive effect on lifestyles and led to a decrease in chronic diseases, thereby resulting in increased health, functional capacity, and well-being in old age.

As is evident in Part Three, *Countries Facing Rapid Population Aging in the Next Twenty to Thirty Years*,

issues of aging and global health facing different countries can take a dramatically different shape. While the average life expectancy in Europe is 75, it hovers around 50 years in the developing world largely due to poverty, malaria, TB, AIDS, and vaccine-preventable diseases. But as the fight against infectious diseases gains ground, older populations will grow in the developing world as well, and chronic conditions will come to the forefront.

Developing countries will be presented with a unique set of challenges as their populations age mainly because, as Alex Kalache, chief of the World Health Organization's Aging and Life Course Program, states in Part Four, "industrialized countries became rich before they became old, while developing countries will become old before they become rich." Entitled *Leaders in Research and Innovative Programs*,

Part Four highlights novel transportation, housing, financing, and education programs developed in government, business, and social sectors to create healthy environments and improve the healthcare and quality of life of the aging population. The experiences and research programs discussed can serve as examples for countries seeking sustainable solutions to the issues facing their aging population.

Part Five, *Epilogue: The Road Ahead*, looks to the future and discusses country-specific opportunities for the improvement of programs, attitudes, and policies developed for their aging population.

There are a few key themes that emerge throughout the book. First, each culture offers unique resources and insights to the new realities of its aging population. Most importantly, global health and aging is an international phenomenon and demands a new international perspective and collaboration. To promote better health, countries around the world need to draw from the collective experience and wisdom to strengthen their health systems with an appropriate emphasis on the needs of their own aging population.

Global Health and Global Aging is a wonderful resource for those seeking to better understand the circumstances, challenges, threats, and opportunities facing aging populations worldwide. Besides being a well organized volume, written by high-profile public policy experts, it might satisfy the reader to know that all the book's royalties will go directly to AARP, the non-profit advocacy and policy organization dedicated to the needs and interests of those 50 and older. ■

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