

CHAPTER IX

Future Directions

The GeroRich Project created a momentum—a “buzz” of enthusiasm—among social work educators nationally regarding the importance of preparing gerontologically competent graduates through infusion of gerontological competencies and content into foundation courses. Through the combined efforts of the Hartford Geriatric Social Work Initiative (GSWI) programs, GeroRich being one, significant progress is being made in terms of both faculty and programmatic development. Social work education as a whole has moved beyond the earlier phase of encountering intractable faculty resistance to gerontological content to garnering the support of faculty, practitioners, and to some extent students. Although pockets of resistance remain, the majority of faculty members are aware that social workers need to be prepared for the demographic changes of the 21st century and are receptive to changing what and how they teach to ensure such preparation. As noted throughout this monograph, practitioners typically buy-in to gero infusion more readily than faculty. Many practitioners have long recognized the need for social workers with foundation gerontological knowledge, skills, and values, and are eager to partner with academic institutions in ensuring such professional development. By contrast, student recruitment to gerontological social work tends to be a major challenge nationally. This final chapter briefly suggests future directions in relation to faculty and programmatic development, community partnerships, and student recruitment. This discussion encompasses future initiatives that might be funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation or other foundations and government funders, as well as ones that social work education programs could develop and sustain without new external resources.

FACULTY AND PROGRAMMATIC DEVELOPMENT

It is estimated that up to 1000 faculty have participated in the GeroRich projects, SAGE-SW Faculty Development Institutes, and the subsequent training activities of the Gero-Ed Center’s Curriculum Development Institutes and the Gero-Ed Institutes. The literature on diffusion of innovations emphasizes that early adopters of innovations tend to be those who are most receptive, which appears to have been the case with the GeroRich projects. In fact, to qualify for GeroRich funding, programs had to provide documentation of their commitment to teaching gerontological competencies and content and thus of their organizational readiness to engage in gero-focused curricular change.

Based on the GeroRich experience, programmatic change initiatives, rather than faculty development targeted toward individual change, appear to have the greatest impact on gerontological social work education. Individually-focused faculty development initiatives may be most effective for providing additional teaching resources on specific topical areas and “fine tuning” after faculty have begun to implement strategies of curricular and organizational change at the programmatic



level. An ideal combination appears to be long-term program level initiatives utilizing the Planned Change Model fostered by GeroRich followed by short-term individual faculty development as in-person or eLearning training on specific gerontological topics.

A primary future challenge is to build capacity through faculty and programmatic development efforts in order to reach the late adopters—those programs that have not participated in any Hartford-affiliated initiatives. To date, the following categories of underserved programs have been identified: those in states where older adults form more than 13% of the population (which is the percentage of older adults nationwide), those that have had no or

minimal Hartford funding, and those that have not had opportunities to participate in any type of Hartford Foundation sponsored events such as the annual Gero-Ed Forum.

Understanding the reasons why social work programs have not participated in the Hartford gero movement is necessary to plan and implement effectively future faculty development and curricular and programmatic change initiatives. Based on preliminary feedback, lack of participation may be due to a number of factors: stakeholder resistance and structural barriers to the concept of infusing gerontological content into foundation curriculum; lack of knowledge or misinformation about the initiatives, especially among programs where faculty and even their academic administrators have limited funds to attend national conferences at which Hartford initiatives are publicized; perceptions held by a program’s faculty or their academic administrators that they would not qualify or compete successfully for funding; faculty’s lack of confidence in proposal-writing; or limited programmatic resources for matching funds, conference travel, and infrastructure support for the faculty members to be able to plan and implement gero curricular changes.

Because of the increasing visibility of Hartford funding for geriatric social work, it is unlikely that many programs are simply unaware of the potential for Hartford Foundation support. And as noted above, the growing “buzz” of the national gero movement suggests that most social work faculty now see the need to prepare gerontologically competent graduates. Instead, the principal current barriers are probably time, proposal writing skills, curricular change experience, and fiscal resources to develop fundable proposals or even to participate in relatively low-cost options, such as Gero-Ed Institutes and eLearning.

The continued existence of these barriers points to the need for intensive, tailored outreach to such BSW and MSW programs, regardless of size or geographic location. There has been a tendency to assume that BSW and small programs will not apply. However, the success of GeroRich projects in BSW and small MSW programs suggests that program size or level is not a primary barrier *per se*. Instead, the factors suggested above may be more salient. In addition, the findings by Sanders et al. (under review) that the process of change was similar regardless of program size, level, or geographic location suggests that those variables, particularly program level, are not the primary ones to target in outreach efforts. Instead, future initiatives should emphasize outreach to programs that either do not perceive the need for gero infusion, face structural barriers to doing so, or do not define themselves as qualified to apply for Hartford funding. For such programs, general mailings of project announcements to deans or directors are unlikely to be successful. A more effective outreach technique would be to identify GeroRich or CDI faculty in a targeted geographic area and provide them with the resources—time, funding, and travel—to meet with faculty and academic administrators in programs without Hartford resources. Another outreach strategy could occur through statewide social work education associations, including those at the BSW level, which typically meet at least annually. Workshops or special symposia to announce Hartford funding and to provide hands-on assistance with proposal writing might be targeted to programs in states with a higher than average percentage of older adults but limited Hartford funding, as well as those with a preponderance of social work programs that have not participated in any Hartford initiatives. A targeted regional approach toward program-level capacity building has the value of seeding multiple institutions simultaneously, thereby creating a critical mass of faculty and programs that can meet face-to-face and collaboratively problem-solve when barriers to change are encountered.

Some social work programs do not have the fiscal resources to support faculty travel to national gerontological social work conferences or workshops, such as the Gero-Ed Center’s Gero-Ed Forum or Gero-Ed Institutes. In such instances, eLearning courses, which can be accessed at low or no cost, and Web-based curricular resources, may be viable options to emphasize through outreach and marketing initiatives. These internet-based resources cannot replace the value of face-to-face

and peer interaction, but they can provide faculty and doctoral students with the teaching resources and tools to begin to prepare gerontologically competent graduates. Web-based mechanisms can also facilitate such programs with limited fiscal capacity to nevertheless communicate with one another and disseminate their accomplishments and lessons learned.

The GeroRich Project—and the subsequent selection of project directors as mentors to CDI programs—demonstrated the value of faculty mentoring. GeroRich project directors and now CDI faculty could be provided with the resources to mentor programs in their regions or cities that have not yet participated in Hartford initiatives, but who want to learn how to infuse gerontology into their curriculum and organizational structure. Mentoring that combines regular face-to-face interaction with phone or email follow up appears to be effective in supporting faculty members' implementing gero curricular and organizational changes. Research and teaching mentoring is central to the Hartford Scholars Program, but typically this has not included how to infuse gerontological competencies and content into one's teaching. Scholars' current training related to teaching could be broadened to encompass gerontology as pedagogy by translating what has been learned through the GeroRich projects into formats useful to these future gerontological social work leaders. An ongoing challenge for all four GSWI programs has been translating and diffusing our lessons learned to each other, but frequent meetings of the GSWI Principal Investigators are facilitating more cross-project activity than in the past.

The GeroRich Project also demonstrated the value of peer problem-solving among faculty by program size, level, and region. And while project directors appreciated the regional networking in the early years of GeroRich, they frequently described feeling even more energized and supported at national meetings in Years 3-5. Peer problem-solving will continue to be best facilitated in the future through opportunities to meet in both regional and national venues, but it can also occur through conference calls or online through bulletin board or listserv formats. Overall, future initiatives need to build on the knowledge and skills now held by faculty who have participated in Hartford programming in order to promote the development of new gerontological social work leaders. Another way that this can occur is to engage GeroRich project directors as authors of eLearning courses on gerontological competencies and content, and as instructors in future faculty development workshops or other training formats. As a result of Hartford funding, there is a critical mass of mid-point career faculty who are poised to provide gerontological leadership, but who may need accessible venues for this to occur regionally as well as nationally.

As noted in Chapter V, significant progress has been made related to gerontological competency-based education, especially with the requirement that GeroEd Center program participants select competencies for infusion. A next step in

competency development is to further articulate the teaching content and resources needed for attainment of each competency and to tie each competency to the relevant evidence-based literature in gerontological social work. Faculty need opportunities to move beyond thinking of competencies as multiple choice questions to be rated by students or answered on an exam to incorporate the broader areas of study around which a class lecture, discussion questions, role plays, assignments, or case studies can be built that will engage students with each competency area. Course instructors will also benefit from recommended and current references of books, articles, and electronic and audiovisual resources that will help them teach about each particular competency item.



Closely related to competency and program development is the provision of technical assistance related to developing outcome measures, determining when and how to gather data on such measures, and then analyzing and disseminating the data gathered. Many social work programs do not have the resources, especially time, to devote to evaluating the outcome of curricular changes or to measuring student competencies. The PPP's Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale now provides a widely tested tool for the measurement of competencies, but some programs may need additional technical assistance with developing other measures or with implementing the rating scale. The current CSWE Commission on Curriculum and Educational Innovation is proposing competency-based education as a future direction for social work educational policy that undergirds accreditation standards. If so, programs that have had Hartford curricular development funds and that have implemented and measured gerontological competencies are well positioned to translate what they have learned regarding gero competency development to other curricular areas in their program. For a competency-based approach to be effective, however, programs will need assistance with how to measure graduates' performance of such skills in the workplace. Admittedly, measurement of curricular and programmatic change initiatives is complex because of the numerous variables that cannot be controlled and the difficulty of measuring student performance outcomes. However, the GeroRich Coordinating Team and project directors have learned a great deal about how to measure changes in knowledge, skills, and values, and this information is beginning to be disseminated to the social work education community

through reports and peer-review articles by GeroRich project directors and affiliated faculty. Such dissemination then needs to be coupled with programs' setting aside adequate resources to ensure ongoing evaluation of the impacts of their curricular changes on students' performance.



Although the need for infusing and sustaining gerontological competencies into foundation courses persists, infusion into specialized content is a logical future direction. What has been learned through the GeroRich projects about the use of a planned change model to infuse gerontological competencies into foundation course work can be translated to infusion of gerontology into advanced courses in specialized content areas other than aging such as child welfare, health care, mental health, interpersonal violence, and substance abuse. Instead of targeting the development of content in an aging specialization alone, this approach would infuse gerontological content into other areas of concentration. For example,

advanced course work in mental health could include content on depression, dementia, and delirium among elders. Students in advanced health-care courses could learn about how drug interactions can underlie what appears to be dementia or depression, or about innovative models for effectively managing chronic illness and promoting health. Advanced course content on interpersonal violence could include attention to elder abuse, neglect, and self-neglect. And substance abuse courses could differentiate treatment modalities for those who have had substance abuse problems throughout their lives and those who develop such problems in old age. The development of advanced aging content as specializations, concentrations, minors, or certificates is also a logical future direction that builds upon foundation gerontological competencies. However, given students' current widespread resistance to a gerontological social work career, more students may acquire advanced gero competencies through infusion into other content areas such as health and mental health than through the development of aging specializations.

Prior chapters have highlighted the centrality of aging with the social work profession's commitment to social justice as well as the intersections of aging with race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, spirituality, and functional ability. This commitment and the intersections are critical for building social

work's capacity to meet the needs of all elders, including those who have experienced historical disadvantage because of race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, or physical or mental ability. Any future faculty or program development initiatives must reach more faculty and students who reflect the racial and cultural diversity of the older population. It is imperative that all gerontological social work faculty leaders—educators, researchers, and practitioners—are both gerontologically and culturally competent. Because cultural competence is inherent in social work's commitment to social justice for all groups in our society, the GeroEd Center staff encourage the development of curricular modules focused on cultural competence with older adults and gero competence with multigenerational families and communities of color.

In sum, a multi-pronged approach to faculty and programmatic development is suggested for the future. This includes targeted outreach to programs across all program levels and sizes, but particularly in states with large concentrations of older adults and in programs that have not yet participated in Hartford curriculum and program development initiatives; ongoing opportunities for faculty colleagues nationwide to network and problem-solve related to curricular and organizational change; Web-based resources (particularly eLearning modules) for programs that lack the resources to participate in national conferences or trainings; ongoing mentoring and assistance related to gerontological infusion (particularly around competencies development and measurement); developing strategies to ensure both gerontological and cultural competence; and translating lessons learned about gerontological infusion at the foundation level to advanced content in areas other than aging, as well as to the three other Hartford GSWI projects (Scholars, Doctoral Fellows, and PPP).

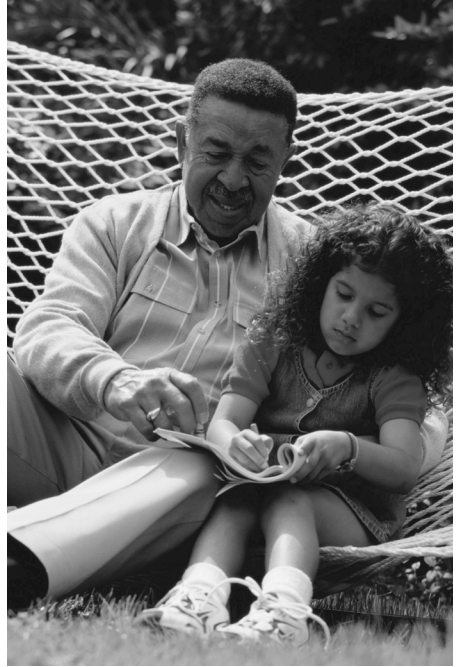
STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Even though the GeroRich Project had the potential to reach nearly 19,000 students per year through gero infusion in the foundation, recruiting culturally diverse BSW and MSW students explicitly for gerontological social work careers is perhaps the major challenge for the field. One reason for this is that no Hartford GSWI program has targeted student recruitment at the BSW and MSW levels, although the Hartford Doctoral Fellows and Pre-Dissertation Fellows focus on future faculty. Even programs with long established specializations in aging have difficulty engaging students—difficulties that were identified by most GeroRich project directors and CDI faculty. Because personal interaction with older adults appears to be the most salient factor for fostering positive attitudes toward older adults, programs need to be creative in ensuring experiential learning with elders for all students. Such options include service learning and other volunteer activities, field placements, course assignments, and involving elders in the classroom as speakers or students.

Organizational changes in social work programs are also necessary to increase the number of professional degree students receptive to working with older adults and their families. For example, recruitment resources could be increased to add a focus on careers in aging, including providing support to admissions directors to attend venues targeted at recruitment for gerontological social work. Such venues might include meetings or conferences of nursing home and assisted living social workers, who are primarily bachelor's level graduates. And outreach efforts could be expanded to the newly emerging unions of direct-care staff who might be recruited to BSW programs and who would bring culturally diverse perspectives to their undergraduate degree. Such outreach has the potential for adding a valuable resource for overall change within a program; culturally diverse students entering with extensive gerontological work experiences may serve, over time, to change the organizational ethos related to issues of aging and older adults and to recruit other students to consider working with elders. Similarly, faculty who are committed to gerontological social work might meet with their admissions staff to provide them with up-to-date information, including alumni anecdotes, about opportunities to work with older adults in a wide range of settings. Admissions directors need to be aware of the newly developing and central role of social workers in innovative point-of-entry models of care coordination and management, management of chronic illness, and health enhancement and wellness programs. Such models emphasize prevention and comprehensive assessment by social workers, rather than disease management. Although targeted recruitment of students who might be receptive to gerontological social work is important, what is likely to remain most effective is ensuring opportunities for students, early in their foundation course work, to interact personally with older adults. As noted throughout this monograph, students who had positive interactions with elders—in service learning, field placements, or interview assignments—were more receptive to consider working with older adults than were those without such personal exchanges.

Efforts to link gero curricular and organizational change explicitly with existing student-focused initiatives could also be promoted, especially the Hartford Doctoral Fellows and Pre-dissertation Fellows Programs. Doctoral participants in these programs could receive training related to the infusion of gerontological competencies and outcome measures, be encouraged to access Web-site-based teaching resources, and be provided with mentoring related to gerontological infusion, just as participants now receive mentoring related to their scholarly work. Since doctoral students are the future teachers—and gerontological social work leaders—it is essential that they be able to participate in such professional development opportunities related to gerontological curriculum change. Although some of the GeroRich projects involved doctoral students, it was often as student assistants with the project, not as an explicitly targeted professional development opportunity for them. And doctoral students may not even be aware of the importance

of learning how to teach gerontological competencies and content until after they have graduated. Instead, they may mistakenly assume that most social work programs are already doing so. Social work professional associations could also help foster student engagement by encouraging the formation of student groups within the associations, a model that has been successfully developed by The Gerontological Society with its Emerging Scholar and Professional Organization composed of students and recent PhDs, just launching their careers. Overall, the development, implementation, and evaluation of creative student recruitment strategies are a likely future direction for the Hartford GSWI.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The GeroRich Project and the PPP both demonstrated that practitioners are generally eager to collaborate with academic programs around the preparation of gerontologically competent graduates. What has been learned from both projects—how to infuse gerontology into the foundation and the advanced curriculum—can help to promote effective integrative models of classroom and field curricula. Similarly, strategies developed by the PPP to recruit students to a rotational model of field education with older adults are relevant to the development of future initiatives to recruit students to advanced gerontological course content. The development of ongoing partnerships with practitioners—field supervisors, alumni, and retired social workers—can facilitate the “gerontologizing” of social work classes and field learning opportunities. The Gero-Ed Center and the PPP will continue to explore ways to learn from each others’ successes in classroom and field and disseminate such accomplishments to the field.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH ELDERS

As noted in Chapters IV and V, nearly all projects involved older adults in some capacity—as guest speakers, field supervisors, co-presenters, or interview respondents. In fact, some projects had the goal that no student would graduate from their program without having interacted with at least one older person. At first blush, this seems to be easily attainable for the GeroRich projects. Yet it is an

ambitious goal to be achieved by all BSW and MSW social work programs nationally. The field of social work education will be transformed when opportunities to interact with elders are viewed to be normative in the same way as are chances to interact with children, youth, and families.

In the future, consideration should be given to strategies to ensure that older adults are viewed as full educational partners, committed to students' learning and respected by all who interact with them. As the Baby Boomers redefine retirement, social work programs might consider how to creatively involve retirees in their students' education as well as in other aspects of their program, such as recruitment of students, engagement with alumni, fund-raising, and advocating for social work education, policy, and practice. Older adults are our society's most underutilized resource. Future gerontological social work initiatives face the challenge of maximizing older adults' contributions to address societal problems by partnering with students, faculty, and practitioners. Assuredly, faculty, students, and practitioners who have participated in GeroRich projects can provide critical leadership related to such respectful partnerships with elders.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented some possible future directions for capacity building for gerontological social work among faculty, practitioners, and students. These suggestions are intended to stimulate your own thinking about next steps for the national gero social work movement—a movement that was furthered by the GeroRich Project as well as by the other Hartford GSWI projects. Future capacity-building strategies, whether externally funded or relying on a program's internal resources, will be most effective when they are coordinated across all the Hartford GSWI initiatives; draw upon the lessons learned to date about curricular and organizational change; utilize and then build on existing curricular and teaching resources; take account of the wide diversity among social work programs, faculty, students, community practitioners, and older adults; and build creative partnerships with elders.

