

Book Review: Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture: Advances in Assisted Living

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BOOKSHELF

Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture: Advances in Assisted Living

By Jane M.R. Mulcahy

***Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture: Advances in Assisted Living*, edited by Benjamin Schwarz and Ruth Brent (The Johns Hopkins University Press 1999)**

Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture: Advances in Assisted Living explores the interrelation between the process of aging, the desire for autonomy, and the long-term care environment. The book's focus is the assisted-living environment. The authors suggest that the assisted-living environment is set apart from the nursing home environment in that the "nursing" component of long-term care is separate from the "room-and-board" component in the assisted-living environment. This separation, the authors state, offers seniors a broader range of choices because the senior can reside in a self-contained apartment and purchase supportive services as needed. This allows seniors to retain their independence as long as possible and avoid institutionalization. Additionally, the authors note that individualiza-

tion is the fundamental premise underlying the assisted-living model of care—routines and services are flexible and can be changed in response to the individual's changing needs.

Part One of the book discusses the ideal assisted-living model, the realistic assisted-living model, and the forces that cause tension between the two.

Part Two of *Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture* discusses the physical attributes of the assisted-living environment and their affect on the behavioral responses of senior residents. The authors compare the assisted-living environment to home. How much like home is it? How much does it allow for the continuation of personal rituals that give meaning to the individual's life? Additionally, the authors recognize the need for environmental designs that cater to the special needs of older adults with dementia and other Alzheimer's type disabilities.

Part Three addresses the unique perspectives of both the providers of care and the consumers of care in the assisted-liv-

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ing environment. The authors explore both the rewards and frustrations of the providers of care, as well as the benefits and drawbacks to the consumers of assisted-living care. Unique design responses in environments for residents with dementia and chronic illness are presented. The authors also confront the common dilemma that no matter how "homelike" the environment is many residents

are unable to adopt it as "home."

Part Four is authored by architects and theoreticians interested in environments for the aging. Design theory is presented and recently built assisted-living facilities are discussed. The authors explore functional as well as aesthetic characteristics of facility designs. The environment's "homelikeness" is a key in its acceptance by seniors.

The authors cite consumer input as an important tool in successful facility design planning.

Finally, *Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture* ponders the forces of change for the long-term care environment. Basically, the authors conclude that as new needs arise, and new designs successfully meet these needs, the assisted-living environment will continue to evolve.