



# CHANGING HEALTH CARE FOR VULNERABLE OLDER ADULTS

## Five Programs of Research

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Four papers discuss the relative influence of scientific, societal, and/or public policy upon the care of vulnerable older adults. Each paper addresses a program of research, an aspect of which influences the quality of health provided. Although the focus of each program of research is different, a common theme is improvement in health care provided for older adults. A second theme is the support for this research provided by the Maggie Allesee Endowment Fund. This funding has made possible both an Endowed Chair to assist with the development of this focus, as well as support for aspects of each of these programs of research.

The background regarding the vulnerability of older adults includes:

They are the fastest growing population segment worldwide and within the US; this extended lifespan brings with it new health care issues that all societies must face; by 2030 there will be 71 million Americans accounting for roughly 1 in 5 of the US population.<sup>1</sup>

The first paper describes the program of research of

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<sup>1</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Merck Company Foundation (2007). *The State of Aging and Health in America*. Whitehouse Station, NJ.

Whall, the Oakland University, School of Nursing, Allesee Endowed Chair. Whall's paper traces the experiential knowledge she has identified within nursing practice that underlies her current program of research. This paper demonstrates the lack of recognition on the part of health care workers, of the remaining ability of older adults, even those with permanent dementia. Improvements in the care provided older adults with dementia are thus a focus of her research.

The second paper by Harrison builds on Whall's work in that Harrison has designed an approach for nurses to use Implicit Memory in their care of persons with dementia. This approach has the potential to revise nursing care protocols for this group of older adults.

The third paper, by Riley Doucet builds upon her experiential knowledge concerning those with dementia needing environmental stimulation. An "up steam" approach, Riley Doucet's approach can be used in the prevention of agitation in dementia. She has designed with Engineering at Oakland University, a soothing multi-stimulating environment that decreases agitation, which in dementia is a preceeds disturbing behavior such as aggression.

The fourth paper, by Dunn, goes beyond the work of Whall, Harrison and Riley Doucet in that it focuses upon health promotion for the largest segment of older adults, those who are well enough and able to live within the community. Focused upon their views of spirituality as one ages, Dunn is working with community based groups to identify their views of spirituality as one ages and the ways in which nursing care may more adequately address the spiritual needs of older adults.