

Enhancing Cognitive Fitness in Adults: A Guide to the Use and Development of Community-Based Programs

edited by Paula E. Hartman-Stein and Asenath LaRue; New York, Springer Publishing, 2011, 522 pages, \$169

Jacqueline Kerr, Ph.D.

When I was asked to review this book, I had also received a request as director of a Successful Aging program to review the current research on “brain fitness” and present it to my program participants. My main area of research is physical activity of older adults, and in the past I have reviewed the literature on cognitive functioning and exercise. But I am a novice when it comes to other programs related to cognitive wellness. Thus my metric for judging the book was, could I read it (in my few spare moments before bedtime) and formulate a practical presentation for older adults in a retirement community?

Given that I just delivered said presentation, my resounding answer is yes. Not only was the book easy to

read (literally I read most of it as bedside reading), the information was extremely practical and enlightening. Admittedly, I followed up on many of the programs with online searches, but the book was a fantastic starting point.

I felt engaged from the start as the editors shared personal stories of cognitive challenges in their families. The scope of the book was appropriate, covering multiple types of programs and always stating how much research had been conducted. Theoretical constructs, such as skill transfer, were clearly outlined, and practical tips for judging consumer brain fitness programs were provided. I learned about basic memory enhancement techniques, about aids that we should use because our memories can fail us at any age, and about activities that lead to social engagement and cognitive sweat. In particular, the chapter that described the Odyssey of

the Mind program was helpful because it demonstrated how complex problem solving and the presentation of solutions involve multiple domains of thinking, memory, and reasoning.

Practitioners will find this book useful because they can learn some simple tips to help aging patients who do or do not have memory problems. They will be able to recommend types of activities that a patient could try informally (playing improvisation games, for example) or through existing programs if they are available locally (such as Experience Corps and Early Memory Loss Clubs). Or if they desired, they could try to deliver a program in their practice. Many of the chapters include guidelines on how to set up and run sessions.

One chapter suggests checking the National Institutes of Health Web site (consensus.nih.gov) for consensus statements on research conducted to date, which I did, and I concluded that the book echoes current understanding and future directions.

The reviewer reports no competing interests. ♦

Dr. Kerr is with the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, University of California, San Diego.