Geropsychiatric Nursing
What’s in Your Toolkit?

The readership of the Journal of Gerontological Nursing (JGN) represents gerontological nurses who provide care across the continuum and in a variety of health care settings. As gerontological nurses, we recognize the vital role we serve in the health promotion, health screening, and complex clinical care of older adults. The American Nurses Association’s (ANA; 2010) “Gerontological Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice” notes:

The goal of gerontological nursing is to provide the highest quality of care to the older adults within a healthcare system facing an unprecedented increase of their numbers. To do so, gerontological nurses employ a shared body of skills and knowledge to address the full range of needs related to the process of aging, the specialized care of older adults, and the uniqueness of older adults as a group and as individuals. These specialists lead interprofessional teams and collaborate with older adults and their significant others to promote autonomy, wellness, optimal functioning, comfort, and quality of life from healthy aging to end of life. (p. 1)

One critical aspect of clinical practice that warrants greater emphasis is geropsychiatric and mental health nursing.

The Institute of Medicine (2012) reports that “at least 5.6 million to 8 million—nearly one in five—older adults in America have one or more mental health and substance use conditions, which present unique challenges for their care” (p. 1). Gerontological nurses recognize that in every patient/resident/client encounter, geropsychiatric and/or mental health issues could have an impact on the health and well-being of the older adult and his/her family. However, many gerontological nurses have had limited educational opportunities that would prepare them to fully implement geropsychiatric and mental health nursing in their nursing practice.

Approximately 15% of the U.S. population comprises older adults (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2015). Despite this current and projected burgeoning of the older adult population, and the concomitant gerontological expertise needed in all aspects of health care, too few nurses choose gerontological nursing as their desired area of practice, and fewer still choose geropsychiatric and mental health nursing. This reluctance is evident in the number of nurses who hold national certification in gerontological nursing at the generalist and advanced practice nursing (APN) levels. Of 2.9 million RNs in the United States (USDHHS, 2014), nationally certified gerontological
Certainly all nurses, but gerontological nurses in particular, are challenged to address the unique mental health problems and specialized approaches required to care for older adults.
The POGOe website also features suggested resources for infusing curricula with geropsychiatric nursing. These resources address key concepts associated with the competency enhancements and include guidelines for use, estimated time to complete, educational objectives, learning resource type, intended audience, and suggestions for best use.

**GEROPSYCHIATRIC NURSING INITIATIVE**

The Geropsychiatric Nursing Initiative (GPNI) is a partnership between the National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence (NHCGNE), the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, and the Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing. A current initiative of GPNI is to offer online continuing education learning on mental health and aging for APNs, other graduate-prepared nurses, and nursing students. Newly developed continuing education modules are available for a modest cost ($30 each; two for $50), and classroom licenses can be purchased.


**GERONTOLOGICAL ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSES ASSOCIATION**

The Education Committee of the Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association (GAPNA) has created a web-based toolkit for APRN preceptors and students (access [https://www.gapna.org/resources/toolkits/toolkit-gerontology-resources-advanced-practice-nurses](https://www.gapna.org/resources/toolkits/toolkit-gerontology-resources-advanced-practice-nurses)). The purpose of the toolkit is to improve access to geriatric and gerontological content for clinical education of APRN students, preceptors, educators, and health care professionals through a single portal of resources. The goal in preparing, annually updating, and sharing as open-access to all is to improve the health care provided to older adults by APRNs and their students (Harrison, 2016). GAPNA (2015) has also published the “GAPNA Consensus Statement on Proficiencies for the APRN Gerontological Specialist” (access [https://pogoe.org/geriatrics-competencies](https://pogoe.org/geriatrics-competencies)), which includes 12 proficiencies—one of which addresses geropsychiatric nursing through:

...the use of evidence-based and best practice approaches to customize strategies to anticipate and manage geriatric syndromes—including cognitive impairments and psychiatric symptoms (confusion, delirium, dementia, depression, anxiety, agitation, and substance abuse). (p. 13)

**THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, COLLEGE OF NURSING, CSOMAY CENTER FOR GERONTOLOGICAL EXCELLENCE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

The University of Iowa’s College of Nursing has led the effort to provide 35 updated Evidence-Based Practice Guidelines focusing on specific concerns and common problems experienced by older adults in long-term care settings (access [http://iowanursingguidelines.com](http://iowanursingguidelines.com)) (Butcher, 2016). *JGN* has published an abbreviated version of each of these guidelines in the Evidence-Based Practice Guideline Section since 2007. Approximately 50% of these guideline topics are relevant for geropsychiatric and mental health nursing. These guidelines can facilitate in-depth “integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values to facilitate clinical decision making and the achievement of optimal patient outcomes and quality of life” (Butcher, 2016, p. 25).

**PORTAL OF GERIATRICS ONLINE EDUCATION**

POGOe is a free collection of geriatric and gerontology educational materials for educators and learners. The materials are available digitally and offer a variety of teaching methods. Funded by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, POGOE is now managed by the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine, on behalf of the Association of Directors of Geriatric Academic Programs. Contributions from medical school faculty and the NHCGNE have resulted in:

...the existence of a robust compendium of instructional and assessment materials [that allow] educators to concentrate more on improving learner performance in practice and not simply on knowledge acquisition. It also makes it easier for non-geriatricians to teach the care of older adults in their respective disciplines. (Ramaswamy et al., 2015, p. 335)

General information is available at [https://www.pogoe.org/about](https://www.pogoe.org/about), with materials created by nursing educators available at [https://www.pogoe.org/nursing/search](https://www.pogoe.org/nursing/search).

**EYE TO THE FUTURE**

Promoting nurses’ greater geropsychiatric and mental health knowledge and skills is critical for the health and well-being of older adults. Gerontological nurses are paramount to this effort. All nurses must recognize the many issues and challenges that older adults face. Nurses should be equipped with competency in identifying older adult geropsychiatric and mental health nursing. These guidelines can facilitate in-depth “integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values to facilitate clinical decision making and the achievement of optimal patient outcomes and quality of life” (Butcher, 2016, p. 25).
health needs, and they should assume a leadership role in assuring that quality care is provided. This editorial has described a number of initiatives underway and has identified readily available resources that nurses can access that will foster this goal. These resources should be incorporated in the curriculum of undergraduate and graduate programs preparing generalist nurses and APNs. These resources should also be offered to practicing nurses as professional development opportunities. There will be few nurses in any health care setting whose practice will not involve care of older adults.

The time is right for further evaluating the extent to which and how the geropsychiatric competency enhancements have been fully integrated as proposed, and what impact these have had on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individuals who are caring for older adults. How are nursing programs measuring these proficiencies? I challenge all of us to keep this important component of nursing practice at the forefront.

Discussions nationally are ongoing regarding formal specialization in geropsychiatric nursing at the APRN level through portfolio development, graduate course offerings and certificates, post-graduate residency or fellowships, and national certification examination. This “top of the pyramid specialization” (APRN Consensus Work Group & National Council of State Boards of Nursing APRN Advisory Committee, 2008) in geropsychiatric mental health nursing would go beyond the population focus role preparation identified in the APRN Consensus document. Could this be one answer to preparing the needed geropsychiatric nurse leaders of tomorrow?

REFERENCES


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