

## Promoting Quality Instruction in the Care of Older Adults

### Core Competencies for Gerontological Nurse Educators

*Mr. Smith, an 86-year-old man, was having problems with vision loss in one eye and visited his medical specialist. During the visit with the specialist and the nursing student, they recommended a battery of tests that Mr. Smith did not think was needed. This discussion quickly escalated into an argument and the specialist mentioned that the tests were important and if Mr. Smith did not have them, the specialist could take his driver's license away because he was not a safe driver. The nursing student felt uncomfortable with the situation; however, she didn't know what to say in the heat of the argument. When she spoke with her nursing instructor, the instructor affirmed that there was nothing she could have done, the specialist was correct. Not only did Mr. Smith not have the tests, this was also the last time he went to this specialist, and for a while, any health care provider.*

As gerontological nurses, we know the importance of health providers who understand aging and the diverse life processes undergone as one ages. We also understand the critical role of gerontological nurses in helping our interprofessional colleagues better understand how to compassionately and properly care for older adults. Development of this understanding begins the first day that nursing students enter their educational program and continues



throughout their career. Nursing students need qualified nursing faculty who understand aging, are positive role models for aging care, and who are able to design and implement learning experiences that engage students. Engaging students includes an understanding of their own perspective about aging, social aspects of ageism, appropriate nursing care across settings, and how to work with other disciplines and persons to provide safe, quality care for older adults.

Nursing faculty who are able to bridge the knowledge, attitude, and skill divide and promote student interest in careers in the care of older adults are critically important. As in other specialties, competencies are important to not only define the requisite expertise, but to also guide career development, faculty selection, and faculty advancement. To address this need, the National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence (NHCGNE) commissioned an Expert Panel to develop the core

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competencies (Wyman et al., 2019). The Expert Panel used a three-phase iterative development process to develop the core competencies and a national survey to validate the competencies, description, and associated exemplars. These competencies were approved by the NHCNE Board of Directors (Wyman et al., 2019).

### **NURSE EDUCATOR CORE COMPETENCIES IN GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING**

The nurse educator core competencies are organized in seven domains: (1) maintains knowledge and skills in the care of older adults; (2) serves as an advocate and positive role model for quality care of older adults; (3) implements innovative teaching strategies for engaging students in learning about healthy aging and care of older adults; (4) facilitates interprofessional learning opportunities for students related to healthy aging and care of older adults; (5) facilitates the integration of concepts of healthy aging and care of older adults in academic and/or professional curricula; (6) collaborates in the evaluation of learning about healthy aging and care of older adults in academic and/or professional development programs; and (7) demonstrates scholarship and leadership that advances gerontological nursing education and practice, and fosters others' professional development. The process of development, core competencies, definitions, and exemplars are described in more detail in the *Journal of Professional Nursing* (Wyman et al., 2019)

and on the NHCNE website (access <https://www.nhcgne.org/core-competencies-for-gerontological-nursing-excellence>).

In addition to establishing the core competencies for gerontological nurse educators, the NHCNE approved a program for formally recognizing those nurse educators who demonstrate mastery of the core competencies. This recognition program, known as the "Distinguished Educator in Gerontological Nursing Program," is open to all nurse educators, including those who teach at any level of academic nursing programs as well as those who teach in professional or staff development programs.

### **APPLICATION FOR THE RECOGNITION PROGRAM AS A DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR IN GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING**

The Distinguished Educator designation recognizes gerontological nurse educators who meet the following criteria:

- Master's or higher degree in nursing.
- Post-baccalaureate academic education in gerontological nursing or related professional development programs.
- Minimum 3 years' experience in gerontological nursing education.
- Active engagement at the time of application in gerontological/geriatric nursing education which could include, but is not limited to: teaching aging or gerontological/geriatric nursing content/courses; curriculum development in geronto-

logical nursing or interprofessional geriatric care; clinical, laboratory, or simulation instruction in gerontological nursing or geriatric care; administrator or coordinator of aging studies, gerontological nursing education, or interprofessional geriatric education programs; providing professional development in gerontological nursing and/or interprofessional geriatric care; or providing community education in aging or gerontological/geriatric content.

Applications are due in late spring and are peer reviewed by a committee of gerontological nursing education experts. A Certificate of Recognition for Excellence as a Distinguished Educator in Gerontological Nursing is awarded to successful applicants at the annual NHCNE Leadership Conference. In 2019, there were 57 successful national and international recipients (access <https://www.nhcgne.org/leadership-development/distinguished-educator-in-gerontological-nursing-program>). The NHCNE Leadership Conference (access <https://www.nhcgne.org/ADCaregivingConference>) also provides an opportunity for distinguished nurse educators to develop a cadre of support with one another, present abstracts describing their curricular innovations and educational projects, and discuss issues and solutions for advancing gerontological nursing education. With a goal of recognizing nursing expertise in the care of older adults and having an impact on faculty development, teaching, and advancement, research is underway to explore the impact of the Distinguished Educator in Gerontological Nursing award and recipients' academic program and career.

Mr. Smith's experience challenged his dignity and independence as an older adult. As gerontological nurses, we know the importance of nurse educators who are skilled in teaching our nursing students about care for the rapidly growing diverse popula-

tion of older adults. We also know that gerontological nursing is stigmatized. These core competencies and recognition program are ways to help address these issues by providing administrators of nursing schools a framework for faculty workforce development, planning, and action. They are also a roadmap for individuals who are interested in careers as a gerontological nurse educator.

## REFERENCE

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