

Gerontological Nursing Competencies: Implementation opportunities

By 2030, the number of older people will grow globally by 56% from 901 million to 1.4 billion people and in Australia 20 per cent of the population will be over 65 years. This is important for planning the healthcare workforce because older people use more healthcare than other age groups. An important question to ask is how the nursing workforce will respond to the needs of older people, specifically the 11% (28,173) of registered nurses (RNs) who work in aged care¹. The impact of RNs in aged care is limited, and as far back as 2002, Government reports stated that “the shortage of qualified staff has reached a crisis point”³. Today, aged care employers cite a “lack of specialist knowledge” among RNs as the main reason for vacancies and RNs themselves experience a lack in professional development opportunities in aged care⁴.

In 2015, two universities and a Nursing Aged Care Collaborative (NACC) partnered to address these issues. Their first outcome was the production of the Gerontological Nursing Competencies (GNCs) for RNs working in aged care. The GNCs were developed from a two-year research project involving a five-round online consultation process with over 400 stakeholders (RNs working in clinical, management, education and research roles) across ten countries (90% from Australia).



Figure 1: Gerontological Nursing Competencies

The GNCs are made up of 11 core competencies (Figure 1) and 33 domains of practice which explain the everyday activities and responsibilities of RNs working with older people in aged care. Importantly the GNCs are organised

around two levels of gerontological nursing practice: ‘essential’ and ‘enhanced’ which provides a career framework for RNs working in aged care who can use the GNCs to describe their specialist gerontological nursing competence.

In September 2018, the partnership completed a 12-month pilot implementation of the GNCs. We trialled a pilot interactive workbook (pp. 63) and website resource which RNs and their allocated mentors from NACC used to complete the GNCs five-step implementation process (Figure 2).

1. Establish mentoring
2. Self-assessment of level of practice
3. Action plan for professional development
4. Generating portfolio evidence
5. Submission of portfolio

Figure 2: Five-step Gerontological Nursing Competencies

Mentors (n=16) and mentees (n=32) from across NSW and ACT participated in focus groups and online surveys to evaluate the GNCs pilot implementation. Mentees were empowered by the process, for example, “It [the pilot implementation] has given me a confidence with what I’m doing. ... I can just put myself against the competency. And then I feel, “Okay, I’m on the right track. I’m doing the right thing.” You know, to better the residents’ care or whatever needs to be done at work.” At the end of the pilot, 90% of mentees agreed that “The GNCs helped articulate a career path for me as a gerontological nurse” and 71% of mentors agreed that “GNCs helped me guide a mentee to focus on their clinical role”. The outcomes from the pilot implementation were overwhelmingly positive and supported the five-step GNCs process.

The NACC partners are now integrating the GNCs into their organizational systems, including quality frameworks, learning and development plans, appraisals and recruitment of RNs. We are also building on the partnership to use the GNCs to create generic aged care student learning experiences and new graduate/ transition programmes. Next, we will promote the GNCs nationally to enable aged care organisations and individual RNs to adopt the GNCs. The GNCs workbook and website provide evidence-based know how on how to improve aged care. The GNCs have the potential to provide the aged care industry with a hallmark for the delivery of excellent nursing care to older people.

Sources

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2016) Registered Nurses National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS) 2016 Fact Sheet Available at : <http://hwd.health.gov.au/webapi/customer/documents/factsheets/2016/Registered%20Nurses%202016%20-%20NHWD%20factsheet.pdf>
Canberra: Department of Health
2. Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs (2002) Report on the Inquiry into Nursing - The patient profession: Time for action Chapter 7 Available at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2002-04/nursing/report/c07 Canberra: Parliament of Australia
3. Aged Care Guild (2016) *Australia's aged care sector: economic contribution and future directions* Available at <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-australias-aged-care-sector-economic-contribution-010616.pdf> Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd

Contact for further detail

Visit our ADHERE web pages <http://www.adhere.org.au>

Professor Victoria Traynor

School of Nursing

Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health

41.209 Science Building

Northfields Avenue

University of Wollongong NSW 2522

T + 61 2 4221 3471

M + 0438 219 484

E victoria_traynor@uow.edu.au

W https://scholars.uow.edu.au/display/victoria_traynor

