

STANDARDS OF GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING



The Gerontological
Nursing Association

***STANDARDS OF
GERONTOLOGICAL
NURSING***

GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING
ASSOCIATION (ONTARIO)

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In September 1985, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) produced a position paper entitled *The HealthCare Needs of Older Persons*. The paper identified four major areas that require change, namely, direct care, the community, education and advocacy. Specific recommendations for implementing change in relation to each area were outlined. One was the development of standards of gerontological nursing. The Gerontological Nursing Association with the support of the RNAO as the initiator and as a resource, struck a committee to develop these standards. They were published in 1987. GNA task forces are established at regular intervals to review and revise the standards.

The standards of gerontological nursing that have been developed are specialty standards. They are intended for Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses working in the community or institutional settings. Gerontological nurses are expected to meet these standards in addition to the basic standards of nursing practice designated by the College of Nurses of Ontario and the Canadian Nurses' Association (CNA), as well as the CNA Code of Ethics for Nursing.

A statement of philosophy and a conceptual framework have been developed to provide the basis for the standards. The standards are built on the major concepts identified in the philosophy and described in the conceptual framework. As the practice of gerontological nursing is a dynamic and evolving specialty, its knowledge base will expand, as will its philosophy, conceptual framework and standards.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY OF GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING

Each older person is unique. Each has values, goals, strengths, limitations, rights and responsibilities. Each develops within a society and influences and is influenced by societal attitudes, culture, spiritual beliefs and the environment.

Gerontological nursing is a specialty that focuses on enhancing the quality of life for the older person in community and institutional settings. The goal of gerontological nursing is to promote optimal health in older persons. Gerontological nursing aims to maximize independence by identifying the strengths of the older person and working with him/her to enhance or maintain these strengths. Gerontological nurses acknowledge the central role that families and friends play in the lives of older persons and their health care.

Gerontological nurses provide creative, compassionate and individualized care incorporating the concepts of prevention, curative rehabilitation and palliation. This care acknowledges the older person's own abilities for health and health practices. Nurses in this specialty facilitate a healthful environment, and promote mutual goal setting and decision making among older persons, family and nurse. Gerontological nurses encourage and provide the opportunity for older persons to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Gerontological nurses respect the older person's dignity and privacy.

Gerontological nurses support a health care system for older persons that is comprehensive and offers a continuum of services across the community and acute and long term care facilities. They are knowledgeable about available

community resources and facilitate the older person's access to these resources. They appreciate the contributions of other members of the health team and members of the social service network and practice collaboratively with them.

Gerontological nursing practice is derived from a specific and evolving body of knowledge pertaining to nursing and the older person. It is theory based. Gerontological nurses continuously expand their knowledge of older persons' health issues through formal and informal educational opportunities, developing clinical expertise, implementing best practice guidelines in the care of the older person and contributing to the testing and expansion of knowledge in the speciality.

Gerontological nurses require working environments that support their rights and provide opportunities for them to fulfil their responsibilities.

The desired outcomes for the older person are best achieved when the health and social systems within which the gerontological nurse practices, support their professional practice and this philosophy.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING

Each older person is unique and at the same time deeply interrelated with others as a consequence of the dynamic interplay of all of life experiences, including the person's physical and mental status, emotional attributes, cultural heritage, family constellation and relationships, socioeconomic and educational circumstances, and spiritual values. This complex background determines how older people perceive their health, what quality of life means to them, and how knowledgeable and comfortable they are in exercising their rights and responsibilities. Gerontological nurses are aware of the factors that contribute to each older person's situation and work with the person to identify what is important to him or her.

Health is "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease".¹ Health includes the ability to function at one's optimal level of independence and to perform those activities that are valued by the individual. As one ages, maintaining independence takes on increasing significance. For some older persons, the ability to function is more difficult as they experience physical and cognitive disabilities and/or terminal diseases. Central to the gerontological nurse's role is assisting older persons to function to their maximum ability or to maintain their comfort and dignity through the dying process.

Individuals of all ages require a sense of mastery over their environment in order to minimize anxiety and stress and to feel secure and in control. The gerontological nurse acknowledges that some older people are no longer able to live independently or in the situation of their choice. Regardless of the setting, gerontological nurses work with older people to help them retain their sense of mastery or regain it when it has been reduced or lost. This is done by

¹World Health Organization. The first ten years of WHO. Geneva: WHO; 1958

creating environments where older people feel comfortable, safe and able to maximize function. The environment will allow the opportunity for privacy, dignity, and maintaining personal lifestyle. Older persons are provided with choices for decision-making and action.

As a specialty, gerontological nursing is concerned with the interrelatedness of health, the environment and older people. Gerontological nursing combines basic nursing concepts with gerontological knowledge and skills to assist older people to maintain a state of health. Gerontological nurses develop sustaining interpersonal relationships with older persons. An essential skill of gerontological nurses is assisting older persons to cope with their physical, environmental, psychosocial, sensory, cognitive and spiritual losses. Gerontological nurses advocate on behalf of older persons to protect and respect their rights and responsibilities. Gerontological nursing also influences society in general about the special needs of older persons.

Gerontological nursing care is provided through the use of theory and its related practice, methodology, and the application of the nursing process which comprises assessment, planning, implementing and evaluation of care. The specialized knowledge of gerontological nursing is incorporated into each step of the nursing process.

STANDARDS & CRITERIA OF GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING

Standard 1 - Uniqueness of Older People

Each older person is unique.

Criteria

The Gerontological Nurse:

- 1.1 Recognizes the factors that influence the older person's experience of aging.
- 1.2 Elicits from older persons their perceptions and expectations of their situations or circumstances and their reactions to these including:
 - patterns of coping
 - satisfaction with health status
 - health goals
 - rights and responsibilities
 - quality of life
- 1.3 Assesses all factors that contribute to the uniqueness of each older person including:
 - physical and mental status
 - emotional attributes
 - cultural heritage
 - family constellation and relationships
 - educational and economic circumstances
 - social and spiritual values

Standard 2 - Functional Ability and Independence

The ability to function and maintain independence is significant for older persons.

Criteria

The Gerontological Nurse:

- 2.1 Acknowledges the importance to the older person of maintaining independence.
- 2.2 Assesses the strengths and limitations of the individual including physical, psychosocial, sensory, cognitive and spiritual function.
- 2.3 Is aware of the factors that interfere with the ability to maintain independence including environmental, physical, psychosocial, sensory, cognitive and spiritual losses.
- 2.4 Assesses the potential safety risks and discusses options to minimize identified risks.
- 2.5 Identifies needs and resources needed to achieve the older person's desired level of independence including, but not limited to:
 - teaching
 - financial
 - family and community
 - accommodation
 - assistive devices
 - personal care
 - emotional
 - spiritual
- 2.6 Negotiates with the older person and /or family a realistic and attainable level of independence.
- 2.7 Assists the older person to achieve the agreed upon level of independence.
- 2.8 Maintains the older person's comfort and dignity throughout the dying process.

Standard 3 - Mastery of the Environment

A sense of mastery over the environment (or life situation) is essential for older persons.

Criteria

The Gerontological Nurse:

- 3.1 Acknowledges that a sense of control over one's environment is fundamental to the well being of older persons.
- 3.2 Elicits from older persons their perception of the environment.
- 3.3 Assesses the environment for factors that facilitate or inhibit an older person's sense of mastery over the environment including:
 - opportunities for participating in decisions that affect the individual's rights and lifestyles
 - attitudes and behaviours of family and professional care providers
 - the environmental design and resources
 - program philosophy and practices
- 3.4 Creates opportunities for individuals to make choices and to take actions that will enhance their sense of mastery.
- 3.5 Creates a comfortable and safe environment that provides the opportunity for privacy, dignity, and maintaining personal lifestyle.

Standard 4 - Gerontological Nursing Knowledge

Gerontological nursing practice is derived from a specific and evolving body of knowledge pertaining to older persons.

Criteria

The Gerontological Nurse:

- 4.1 Acknowledges the existence and uniqueness of a body of knowledge related to gerontological nursing practice. This includes:
 - functional status
 - normal aging
 - health promotion
 - disease prevention
 - care of the ill
 - family dynamics
 - community resources
 - principles of rehabilitation
 - assistive devices
 - principles of palliation
 - environmental influences
 - activities of daily living
 - losses
 - the impact of disease processes
 - legislation pertaining to the elderly
 - mental health
- 4.2 Assumes responsibility for having current knowledge in the specialty.
- 4.3 Practices on the basis of this specialized knowledge.
- 4.4 Participates in the development and testing of knowledge in the specialty.
- 4.5 Communicates this knowledge to others including:
 - older persons
 - professional and non-professional care providers
 - families
 - members of the community
- 4.6 Incorporates Best Practices for the care of the older person.

Standard 5 - Sustaining Interpersonal Relationships

The development of sustaining interpersonal relationships facilitates older persons to cope with their health care experiences.

Criteria

The Gerontological Nurse:

- 5.1 Acknowledges that sustaining interpersonal relationships with older persons are continuing, enabling, supportive and nourishing.
- 5.2 Elicits the older person's perception of the interpersonal relationship.
- 5.3 Demonstrates the ability to develop a sustaining interpersonal relationship.
- 5.4 Facilitates the older person to sustain interpersonal relationships with significant others.

Standard 6 - Advocacy

Gerontological nurses advocate with older persons and on behalf of older persons to protect their rights and responsibilities.

Criteria

The Gerontological Nurse:

- 6.1 Acknowledges & respects the older person's rights and responsibilities.
- 6.2 Educates older persons and their families about their rights and responsibilities.
- 6.3 Elicits the views of the older person.
- 6.4 Encourages and provides the opportunity for individuals to exercise their rights and responsibilities.
- 6.5 Recognizes situations where the older person's rights may be jeopardized and takes actions to protect the older person's interests/well-being.
- 6.6 Accepts responsibility for the role of advocacy and recognizes the potential implications.
- 6.7 Influences society in general regarding the special needs of older persons.

Approved by the Board, November 4, 2004

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