

The Importance of Gerontology Certification for Quality Patient Care

Why is gerontology certification important?

During this past century, there has been a significant increase in the number of older Americans and an increase in their life expectancy. Today, the day-to-day practice of most nurses involves caring for older patients. Here at MGH, older adults comprise 43% of our inpatient admissions. As the numbers of older adults continues to grow, it has become increasingly important to increase the numbers of nurses who have specialized knowledge about the care of older adults. We know that few nurses have received gerontological education and nationally less than 1% of nurses are certified in gerontology nursing. This is of concern because it has been shown that outcomes of care improve when nurses with geriatric knowledge and skills care for older patients.

Recognizing this growing need at MGH, we became the first hospital in Massachusetts to join a national movement, NICHE, whose goals are to improve the care of hospitalized older adults. Here at MGH, we call this interdisciplinary approach to care, *65Plus*. *65Plus* sponsored a “Best Practices in Acute Care for Older Adults” conference to provide our health care providers with competency and gerontological expertise in the care of older adults. Over 126 staff registered to attend this important conference. This two-day program also served to help prepare our nurses for the ANCC Gerontological Nurse Certification exam. Providing gerontological education and certification support is one of the ways that will help our nurses meet the specialized needs of our older patients.

Who can become certified in gerontology?

Registered nurses actively involved in the care of older adults. The American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) offers different types of gerontological certification: gerontological nurse certification and gerontological clinical nurse specialist or gerontological nurse practitioner certification for advanced practice nurses. To sit for this certification exam you must have the equivalent of two years full time practice, 30 continuing education contact hours focusing on geriatric issues and 2000 hours of clinical practice in gerontology nursing. Many nurses think they don't meet these requirements, yet most do when you consider the fact that more than half the patients in any medical or surgical area maybe over 65 years old. For example, if you are working full time for 50 weeks a year and 50% of your overall patient population is over the age of 65, you will have 1000 hours of clinical practice in that year.

Do other Patient Care Services' disciplines have a specialty in Gerontology?

Physical therapy has the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS) certification in geriatric physical therapy from the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). A physical therapist builds on a broad base of professional education and practice to develop a greater depth of knowledge and skills related to a particular area of practice. The specialist certification program is rigorous and was established to provide formal recognition for physical therapists with advanced clinical knowledge, experience, and skills in a special area of practice. PCS Physical Therapy Department supports pursuit of board certification and currently has 6 geriatric board certified therapists.

Why should I consider becoming certified?

As you prepare for certification, you are enhancing your knowledge about the care needs of older adults, which improves patient outcomes. Becoming certified in gerontology enhances professional development by validating your specialized knowledge and expertise and level of clinical competence. It identifies you as a leader in gerontology to your peers and to your patients. All of which are important components of the Clinical Recognition Program.

How can I learn more about the application process?

Information about the application process is on the Patient Care Services website. Go to *The Norman Knight Center for Clinical & Professional Development* link and click on *Professional Certification in Nursing* for easy access to the ANCC information. The Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing also has a wonderful website, www.ConsultGeriRN.org with all the information you need specific to gerontology certification.

How can I prepare for the exam?

There are a number of wonderful resources available to help you prepare for the exam, including content outlines, a free on-line review course and sample test questions. Go to the Certification section of www.ConsultGeriRN.org for more information about these resources.

Does Patient Care Services offer any financial support?

Financial support is provided to registered nurses in Patient Care Services through the E. Louise Berke Fund for Gerontology Nursing. The fund reimburses registered nurses for the cost of the certification exam. It does not cover the cost for study materials or review courses. You may be eligible for a discount, if you are a member of certain professional organizations. Check the ANCC website for more information.

For questions about the gerontology certification process, contact Deborah D'Avolio, PhD, APRN-BC at 643-4873.