

Centers of Geriatric Nursing Excellence Recruit Faculty and Students Needed to Enhance the Care of Older Adults

Building Geriatric Nursing Capacity Requires Institutional Commitment, Multiple Strategies

A nursing education program that seeks to create strong geriatric nursing education and research programs should focus on several areas.

- *Build a critical mass of faculty interested in geriatrics.*
- *Preparing future academic leaders through focused recruitment to geriatric nursing, including dissertation support and pilot research funding.*
- *Generate new knowledge about more effective care systems to meet the needs of the elderly through scholarship.*
- *Foster community partnerships for the dissemination of best practices in geriatric nursing and recruitment of students to geriatric nursing specialties.*
- *Create endowed chairs in geriatric nursing to create an anchor for geriatric research and teaching in the nursing school.*

Nurses play a critical role in caring for sick and frail older adults, yet not only is there a general shortage of nurses in the United States, even fewer nurses have specialized geriatric skills. Of the 2.56 million registered nurses in the U.S., less than 15,000 (.005%) are certified gerontological nurses, and of the 111,000 advanced practice nurses, only 3,500 (3%) are gerontological nurse practitioners or clinical specialists. This presents a looming crisis as fewer gerontological nurses will be available to care for a growing number of older patients. Equally important, the faculty to train future nurses in geriatrics is in extremely limited supply, too, and new research on health needs of older Americans is urgently needed.

To begin to address these needs, nursing schools need to increase the profile of geriatric nursing in order to attract new talent to the field, create collaborative relationships between academia and community health care institutions, generate new projects and programs for moving evidence-based knowledge into practice, and launch the research projects that will lead to more effective and efficient care for our country's older adults.

The JAHF Contribution



Since 1995, the John A. Hartford Foundation has provided \$10.7 million for the John A. Hartford Foundation Institute for Geriatric Nursing at New York University and, in 2000, designated five schools of nursing around the country as Centers of Geriatric Nursing Excellence. Each school received a five-year grant of approximately \$1.33 million and were required to raise matching funds, as well. Using grant support as a catalyst, each school has increased their geriatrics faculty and recruited students to pursue research for better nursing care for older Americans.

Centers of Excellence Promote Research and Training in Gero-Nursing

The nursing shortage is projected to worsen for a variety of reasons, including a five-year drop in baccalaureate nursing enrollments, a flat enrollment in doctoral programs that produce nurse educators, a shortage of qualified faculty in schools of nursing, an aging nursing workforce (average age 43.3), and an even older nursing faculty (with 52.1 and 48.5 the average age of associate and assistant professors). For gero-nursing, the shortage is compounded by an often negative perception of caring for older adults.

The faculty to train future nurses in geriatrics is in extremely limited supply, too, and new research on health needs of older Americans is urgently needed.

There is a critical need to expand and improve academic gerontological nursing programs and clinical nursing care to stave off this crisis. The seeds for change must be sown within nursing education, and one way to accomplish this change is through the development of more centers of geriatric nursing excellence (CGNEs). Schools of nursing can begin with some essential elements and build from there. “The major goals of any research education center are to generate new knowledge and advance the science, and do it in a context that prepares the next generation of scholars,” says Mary D. Naylor, PhD, RN, FAAN, Marian S. Ware Professor in Gerontology, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania.

Build a Critical Mass of Faculty

To begin to create a CGNE, it’s first essential to recruit faculty specializing in geriatric nursing and gerontology. Experience suggests this should begin with a cluster of at least three professionals, along with both doctoral and post doctoral students. Once a school has at least three identified scholars in this area, this core will attract other resources and faculty.

“As you begin to have two or three faculty members doing research with geriatric populations, word gets out that something’s going on in geriatrics,” says Lois K. Evans, DNSc, RN, FAAN, Viola MacInnes/Independence Professor, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania. “That begins to build a reputation, which becomes like a magnet. The more that gets done, the more likely people will be to want to come there to study or join the faculty. That’s how you build critical mass.”

In addition to recruiting geriatric specialists, there are other creative and effective strategies for building excitement in gerontology. For example, faculty in other specialty areas (such as oncology, community health, mental health, cardiology, etc.) may have research interests that relate to aging, yet they would not identify themselves as geriatric nurses. The contributions they’re making to the science, however, benefit older people. “We’ve been able to bring them together with geriatric specialists for collaborative research,” says Dr. Evans. “In this way, it’s possible to create a dynamic mass of researchers with shared interests.” A CGNE designation, of course helps, but other models including scholarly interest groups or multi-disciplinary research centers can work, as well.

Once a school has at least three scholars in geriatric nursing, the core group will attract other resources and faculty.

Prepare Future Academic Leaders

In addition to amassing a top notch faculty, nursing schools must also be committed to preparing future leaders. One way to do this is through pilot study grants to help doctoral and postdoctoral students, as well as faculty, jumpstart their research by testing feasibility, collecting data, or obtaining statistical assistance. Even small grants of \$2,000 to \$5,000 can help researchers move far enough ahead to apply for larger grants. "Giving scholarships and grants to young scholars gives them permission to describe themselves as outside the pack and helps them to reach their potential," says Dr. Mezey.

Generate New Knowledge and Translate Research to Practice

Building a critical mass of faculty, funding chairs, and providing pilot funding all help to generate new knowledge and provide the basis for translating research findings into practice.

The nature of nursing science focuses on the comprehensive care needs of older adults and their families. Distinct from other health care professionals, such as physicians, nurses address the physiologic and psychosocial needs of patients within the context of their families and communities. The major contribution of geriatric nursing is in clinical research and systems research. That is, devising and testing care systems to meet the older adults' needs.

In addition to promoting research toward this end, CGNEs also seek to move research into clinical practice. This is accomplished through the creation and dissemination of best practice protocols, translational tools including web-based training and clinical information systems, and the development of collaborative relationships between academia and community health care institutions to test and put evidence-based best practices into clinical use.

Dissemination of best practices through traditional avenues, such as journals, web sites, and presentations and posters at professional meetings can help to communicate new findings from research. But often even more intensive efforts are required to promote the adoption of new programs and practices by health care systems, insurers, and purchasers.

The CGNE at Oregon Health and Science University, for example, has developed collaborative relationships with local health systems, such as long-term care facilities and the VA hospital, to improve systems of care for the elderly by moving research systematically into clinical practice.



Pilot grants can help students and faculty jumpstart their research, apply for larger grants, and give emerging scholars the needed imprimatur to pursue geriatric nursing scholarship.

Fund a Chair in Geriatric Nursing

“Establishing an endowed chair in gerontologic nursing ensures that a senior leader in geriatric nursing will always be on the faculty,” according to Mathy Mezey, EdD, RN, Director, Hartford Foundation, Institute for Geriatric Nursing. Dr. Evans, from the University of Pennsylvania, believes that a funded chair also lets the public and the rest of the profession know that a foundation or a donor viewed this as such an important area that they were willing to make a financial commitment to it.

Even if a school can’t get the funding for an endowed chair, there are other strategies for achieving the same goal. For example, the School of Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania developed “term chairs,” which are funded for a finite period of time and require smaller amounts of money. Unlike an endowed chair, the money for a term chair gets spent down over time. But this is a means to get started towards a named chair in gerontologic nursing, and to highlight aging-related research.

For More Information

ASK GRANTEES: ANY ARTICLES THAT COULD BE CITED HERE?

HGNI.org

The Web site of the Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative contains links to all funded programs and the initiative’s coordinating center. Visitors to www.hgni.org can also sign up for the HGNI’s monthly e-newsletter, j2

New Directions,” which is full of helpful resources and information for schools of nursing and their faculty interested in developing their capacity in gerontology.

BAGNC

Administered by the American Academy of Nursing, the Building Academic Geriatric Nursing Capacity (BAGNC) Project maintains a Web site (<http://www.geriatricnursing.org>) that includes information about the CGNE program, as well as its pre- and post-doctoral fellowship programs.

For More Copies

This action brief is available on the Hartford Foundation’s website, <http://www.jhartfound.org/IDEAS/academicnursing>.

