

## Promoting Age-friendly Health Systems: The Crucial Role of Nurses in Elder Care

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### Commentary

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### INTRODUCTION

As the global population continues to age, the demand for healthcare services tailored to the needs of older adults is on the rise. Age-friendly health systems prioritize the delivery of high-quality, person-centered care that enhances the well-being of elderly patients. Nurses, with their holistic approach to patient care and deep understanding of geriatric health, play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing age-friendly initiatives within healthcare systems. As populations age worldwide, the need for specialized elder care continues to grow. Within this context, nurses serve as linchpins in delivering holistic, person-centered care to elderly individuals. Their multifaceted roles encompass not only clinical expertise but also compassion, advocacy and support for both patients and their families.

Age-friendly health systems are designed to meet the unique needs and preferences of older adults across various healthcare settings, including hospitals, clinics and long-term care facilities. These systems prioritize four key elements known as the "4Ms": What Matters (aligning care with patients' goals and preferences), Medication (ensuring appropriate medication management), Mentation (preventing and addressing cognitive impairment) and Mobility (optimizing mobility and preventing falls). By integrating these principles into practice, age-friendly health systems aim to enhance the quality of care and promote healthy aging<sup>[1,2]</sup>. Nurses serve as frontline advocates for elderly patients within health systems, championing initiatives that prioritize their well-being and autonomy. Their role encompasses various aspects of care delivery, including assessment, care coordination, education and advocacy. Nurses leverage their expertise in geriatric nursing to assess the comprehensive needs of older adults, taking into account physical, cognitive, emotional and social factors that influence health and wellness.

### DESCRIPTION

Central to the concept of age-friendly health systems is the provision of person-centered care, which recognizes the individuality of each patient and honors their values, preferences and goals. Nurses excel in establishing therapeutic relationships with elderly patients, engaging in active listening and fostering open communication. By eliciting patients' perspectives and involving them in care planning decisions, nurses ensure that care delivery aligns with their preferences and promotes dignity and respect. Safe and appropriate medication management is crucial for older adults, who may be more vulnerable to adverse drug reactions and drug interactions. Nurses play a vital role in conducting comprehensive medication assessments, reconciling medications across transitions of care and educating patients about their medications. By promoting adherence to medication regimens and monitoring for potential side effects, nurses contribute to the prevention of medication-related complications and adverse events.

Preventing falls and maintaining mobility are paramount for preserving the independence and functional status of elderly patients. Nurses conduct fall risk assessments, implement preventive measures and facilitate mobility-promoting activities such as exercise programs and ambulation assistance. Through patient education and environmental modifications, nurses create safer care environments and empower older adults to remain active and engaged in their daily lives<sup>[3,4]</sup>. Nurses are often the first point of contact for elderly patients entering healthcare settings, whether in hospitals, long-term care facilities, or home care. They conduct thorough assessments to evaluate the physical, cognitive, emotional and social needs of older adults. This holistic approach allows nurses to develop personalized care plans that address each individual's unique requirements and preferences. By considering factors such as mobility, nutrition, medication management and social support networks, nurses lay the foundation for comprehensive and effective elder care.

Elderly patients often contend with multiple chronic conditions requiring complex medication regimens. Nurses play a crucial role in medication management, ensuring that prescriptions are administered safely and accurately. They educate patients and

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their caregivers about proper medication administration, potential side effects and the importance of adherence. Additionally, nurses provide valuable health education on topics such as disease management, nutrition, fall prevention and symptom recognition, empowering older adults to take an active role in their own health and well-being. Advocacy is a central tenet of nursing practice, particularly in the realm of elder care where vulnerable individuals may face unique challenges. Nurses serve as staunch advocates for their elderly patients, safeguarding their rights, dignity and autonomy. They liaise with interdisciplinary teams, family members and community resources to ensure that patients receive the support and services they require. Whether advocating for pain management, end-of-life care preferences, or access to social services, nurses act as unwavering champions for the well-being of older adults.

Elderly patients may experience a range of emotions related to aging, illness, loss and life transitions. Nurses provide compassionate emotional support, lending a listening ear, offering reassurance and validating patients' feelings<sup>[5]</sup>. In situations where curative treatment is no longer viable, nurses play a pivotal role in palliative and end-of-life care. They facilitate discussions about advance care planning, symptom management and comfort measures, ensuring that patients' wishes are honored and their final days are spent with dignity and peace. Maintaining independence and preserving quality of life are paramount goals in elder care. Nurses implement strategies to optimize older adults' functional abilities and promote active aging. Through mobility assistance, rehabilitation therapies and adaptive equipment, nurses help older adults maintain their autonomy and engage in meaningful activities. By fostering a nurturing and empowering environment, nurses empower elderly patients to live their lives to the fullest extent possible, regardless of age or health status.

## CONCLUSION

Promoting age-friendly health systems requires a collaborative effort involving healthcare professionals, administrators, policymakers and community stakeholders. Nurses, with their holistic approach to care and unwavering commitment to patient advocacy, play a central role in this endeavor. By championing person-centered care, facilitating effective communication, optimizing medication management and promoting mobility and fall prevention, nurses contribute to the creation of healthcare environments that honor the dignity, autonomy and well-being of older adults. As advocates for elder care within health systems, nurses continue to shape the future of aging and pave the way for age-friendly practices that benefit individuals across the lifespan. In the landscape of elder care, nurses play an indispensable role as advocates, caregivers, educators and emotional supports. Their holistic approach to patient care, coupled with their unwavering dedication and compassion, makes a profound difference in the lives of aging individuals and their families. As the demand for elder care continues to rise, nurses will remain at the forefront, ensuring that older adults receive the comprehensive support and compassionate care they deserve.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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