INDEPENDENT GERIATRIC NURSE PRACTITIONER

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The main public health challenge of the 21st century is to consolidate the advantages gained from science & technology not only to increase life span but also to improve quality of life. The increased longevity should be accompanied by a corresponding increase in the care & facilities for the old. Nursing always has responded to the changes in society’s health care needs. Nursing needs to identify practice & feasible clinical roles which provide scope for independent professional practice. Among the clinical specialization, Geriatric Nursing is a tangible area where the role of nurse is accepted & approved. There is need of geriatric Nursing care providers to meet the health need of growing proportion of elderly population.

Increasing Elderly population

There has been significant & growing concern about the rapid increase in number of elderly people & their quality of life all over the world. The twentieth century has witnessed in many regions of world the control of infant mortality rate, decline in birth rates, improvement in nutrition, basic health care & control of many infectious diseases. These constellation of factors have resulted in an increasing number & proportion of person surviving into the advanced stages of life.

In India, according to 1981 census out of total population of 685.2 million, 44 million were aged 60 yrs. & over. In the 1991 census the no. of elderly was about 55.3 million i.e. six percent of total population of 844.3 million. The no. of people over 60 yrs. is expected to touch 60 million mark in the next census report. According to United Nation & aging document, in the 75th yrs. from 1950 to 2025 the world elderly population (60 yrs. of age & above) will have increased from 200 million to 1.2 billion, or 8.14% of total global population. Among the elderly, the ‘old’ old (those who are 80 yrs. of age & above) will have grown from 13 million in 1950 to 137 million in 2025.

Need of independent Geriatric Nurse Practitioner

The growing elderly population places extra demand on gerontologist nurses. In the past while individuals may have lived upto advanced stages of life, their no & proportion in total population were not matter of concern and the joint family system provided the required support and a place of dignity for them. But today, the socio-cultural change have moved in almost reverse direction viz. breaking down of joint family system modernisation, rapid urbanization and emergence of new value system based on self centered individualism.

Due to urbanization, city based life, young people are sometime not in position to take care of aged people. In the city based life most aged people are left with feeling of complete isolation. Whether at hostel or at homes they require medical attention. Philanthropist & well wishers have come forward to provide facilities for these old people & build up old age homes.

Nurses should come forward to organize geriatric health services. There is need for geriatric nursing care providers to meet the health needs of growing elderly population. The care of elderly need special emphasis because of their frailty & vulnerability (WHO 1984). They are integral part of society and entitled to their fair share of health & societal services. By providing quality care nurses contribute to adding quality of life to the elderly.

Role of Independent Geriatric Nurse Practitioner

Gerontologic & geriatric nursing is the field of nursing that specializes in care of elderly. The basic nursing process of assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementing & evaluation is used in combination with specialized...
knowledge of aging. Gerontologic nursing care can be provided in acute chronic or community setting. Emphasis of care is placed on promoting, maintaining & restoring health & independent strength of older adults are identified and used to help them achieve optimal independence. The nurse helps the older person to maintain dignity and maximum autonomy despite physical, social & physiological losses. In addition, creativity in instituting nursing intervention can help person achieve positive & mental health.

The adult day care centers are based on the knowledge of the aging process & theories about aging nurses form the strategies and goal for care of elderly client. Nursing homes offer a variety of health & personal services that include skilled nursing care and rehabilitation. Adult day care facilities offer daily nursing care and social opportunities, allowing family members to carry on daily activities. Caring for elderly client can be done at home setting. A gerontologic nurse has to assess and determine if any change need to be made in elderly home environment and support system to meet the physical & psychosocial needs of the patients.

Nurses should come forward to organize geriatric health services, support voluntary agencies taking such services; community health nurses are highly appropriate to supervise the care of aged. They can provide the home based services in acute & severe sickness. Geriatric nurse can organize regular camps, health education & health check ups for the aged in their areas.

The cost of adult care center, nursing homes, home visit comes out of patients and family funds.

Discussion

The nursing curriculum in India does not prepare nurses adequately to handle the aged. So, it is advised that nurses should be given opportunities to get special skills in caring for the elderly. The geriatric component should be strengthened in nursing & medical curriculum in preparation for increasing number of old people in every part of country during the next decades. Short courses in geriatric nursing should be encouraged. A cadre of geriatric nursing care providers needs to be established to meet the specific health problems of growing elderly population.

CONCLUSION

The rapid transformation in the health care delivery system demands the need for nurses whose education prepares them for an advanced role in clinical area. As the turmoil of health care reform continues to capture the attention, revolutionary changes are underway in the health care system. The integration of health care agencies require nursing practice to cross multiple settings, increasing the autonomy of the professional nurse. Apart from becoming highly autonomous, they are able to function as independent cost effective practitioner. Therefore independent geriatric nurse practitioner is the need of the hour.

References:
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