

Training courses for geriatric nursing

Starting point

The tasks carried out by geriatric nurses stretch very far from basic care, treatment according to doctor's orders and continuous observation (monitoring) to planning, organisation and documentation. Furthermore the assessment of care requirements, recognition of health compromising conditions and creation of a psychologically stimulating environment are all part of geriatric nursing. This also means to be able to intervene in a problematic somatic and psychosocial crisis situation.

Geriatric nurses also maintain the contact and information flow to the relatives, they try to involve them in the patient care and to offer advice. They are also needed to help patients deal with illness, understand and accept their disease, accept disabilities and deal with the subject of death. Geriatric nurses are often the closest or even the only people who accompany the elderly to their death. Hence the nurses are often the most important people surrounding the elderly inhabitants of geriatric homes. Physical and/or psychological troubles are noted first by the nursing staff thus they present an important link between the geriatrics, medical staff and relatives.

Known deficits

The training of geriatric nursing staff does normally not include detailed education about depressive disorders. The nurses are not trained to differentiate between sorrow, a depressed mood and a full-on depression. Many geriatric nurses tend to ascribe a depression in elderly people to a normal process of ageing. The treatment options available are usually not well known. On the other hand, caring for the elderly who are suffering from depression and dealing with their mentioning of suicidal thoughts is often too much to handle for the nursing staff. The necessity to advise the doctors of the symptoms and possible suicidal plans and arguments for treatment are often strongly underestimated.

Contents and aims of the training course

The importance of depressive disorders is demonstrated using many practical examples. Geriatric nursing staff is specially educated about symptoms, treatment, diagnosis and causes of depression in elderly people. The nurses should be able to recognise a possible depressive disorder, even if covered up by other symptoms or disorders and to react accordingly. They are introduced to an established and simple screening system to recognise depression. Recognising and dealing with suicidality is an important part of the seminar.

Practical information

Training courses for geriatric nurses (stationary) should only be offered during the main working hours (9.00am – 6.00pm). The training should not last longer

than four hours and seminar groups should only include 10 to 15 participants in order not to compromise the staffing of a department at any time. Several training sessions should be available in order to enable all staff members to take part in a course. Experience has shown that the interest in this training course is very high. It is advisable to structure the training course in relatively short theoretical parts with many case examples and a lot of room for discussion. Role-plays are quite uncommon for nursing staff and could therefore be difficult to include in the seminar. Demonstrations and videotapes are more efficient.

The subject of 'suicidality' quickly raises a discussion about euthanasia. Explaining the causes and development of suicidality will keep the discussion round more to the topic.