

Nurses and Non-Nurses Perceptions of Older People
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Problem: For the past several years, initiatives to improve the knowledge level of nurses regarding older people have grown. Although reports say that students rarely select gerontology as a specialty; the fact of the matter is that nurses take care of older patients in all kinds of settings – hospitals, home care, acute care, and ambulatory settings. Knowledge about older people is necessary since there are over 36.3 million Americans age 65 and older (USDHHS, 2006).

Evidence: Assessment of knowledge regarding older people from various groups is needed to come up with a consensus of how the “OLD” are being perceived and what can be done to correct misconceptions. Armed with assessment findings, educators will be prepared to provide information to student about the needs of older people.

Strategy: Nurses and traditional undergraduate students were asked to participate in a research study to examine the differences between nurses and traditional undergraduate students regarding knowledge of older people.

Practice change: An aging course, in addition to infusing gerontology topics into the curriculums of both the undergraduate baccalaureate nursing program and health studies program was added.

Evaluation: The Facts on Aging Quiz One (FAQ) (Palmore, 1988) was used for this study. The questionnaire consists of twenty five true and false statements.

Results: There were 68 participants, 44 nurses and 25 non-nurses. The age of the nurses ranged from 20 – 64 with a mean age of 40 years. The age of the traditional students ranged from 18 – 52, with a mean age of 20. There was one person age 52.

An independent t-test detected no significant difference in knowledge level between nurse and non-nurse ($t = 1.339$, $df = 66$, $p = .185$). The results were surprising, especially since a large number of nursing students in this sample worked with the elder population. The mean number of questions incorrectly answered by nurses was 8.25 and 9.16 for non-nurses. Approximately one third of the questions were answered incorrectly.

Recommendations: The results from this study showed that undergraduate students, including nurses need additional information about older people. Due to the demographics of a graying America, there is increased interest in the topic of growing older. Initiatives to improve the knowledge of nurses and non-nurses about older people are the responsibility of faculty everywhere.

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