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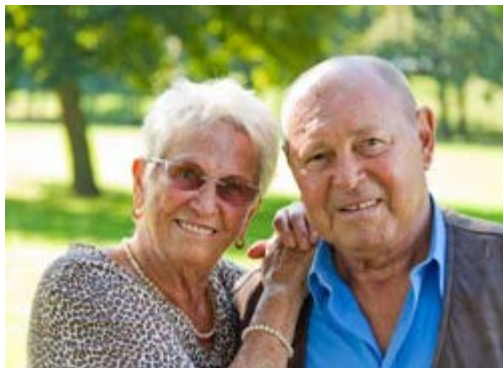
Consider Specialization in Dementia Care

By [Eileen Beal](#) | Feb 19, 2013 | Posted In [Industry News](#), [Specialties](#)

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Due to our aging population and growing numbers of patients with dementia, more nurses are gaining specialization in dementia care. To help you learn more about this field of nursing, we interviewed Carol A. Miller, MSN/Geriatrics, RN-BC, a nationally-recognized expert on the care of people with dementia and a geriatric care manager.

How does care for those with dementia differ from care for those without dementia?

I see dementia as an overlay on an already complex situation. On top of everything else that's going on in the care setting for the patient — the medical issues they are dealing with, the sensory problems they may be dealing with, the cultural issues and differences they encounter, the stereotypes staff may have about older patients — the patient with dementia is also dealing with cognitive impairment.

Whether it [dementia] is mild or moderate or advanced, it always makes assessment and care more challenging, especially when there are behavioral problems. Many patients with mild dementia are able to hide it, but when they have moderate or advanced dementia there are usually behavioral issues [confusion, agitation, inappropriate verbalization, etc.] due to the changed environment or the change in who's providing care.

You can't make generalizations, however, because each patient and each patient's situation is different.

While the elderly (those 65 and over) make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population, they make up almost 40 percent of the patients in hospitals. What's that mean for hospital-based nurses?

Right now, it means — not just for hospital nurses but also for those working in medical offices and clinics and hospice and palliative care organizations — that some percentage of that 40 percent will have some degree of dementia. And, as the population continues to age, no matter what adult care setting a nurse is working in, it means they will be caring for more people with dementia.

Since nurses will be seeing more people with dementia, should they be getting additional education in dementia care?

Nurses need to keep up-to-date in dementia care so they definitely need the most current theoretical and clinical information. And by current, I mean what's in the latest textbooks, the latest journal articles and at the best Internet sites. For good resources, I suggest [ConsultGerRN](#); both the [Alzheimer's Association](#) and the [Alzheimer's Foundation](#) sites; and the [National Institutes of Health](#), too.

What about certification in dementia care? Where can nurses get that?

Several organizations offer additional training, even certification, in dementia care. The Alzheimer's Foundation does training programs. And there are certification programs [for healthcare professionals] provided by several organizations, too (see below). Some hospitals do geriatric assessment programs, which are especially useful for emergency room nurses. Some hospice and palliative care organizations also are doing training.

In your opinion, in which areas of nursing would nurses definitely benefit from getting additional education and training in dementia care?

There are so many! Oncology and hospice and long-term care, those are obvious. Not so obvious: ER, urology, neurology, orthopedics, cardiac care, community clinics and home care. If you are taking care of older adults, then you are taking care of people with dementia.

Getting additional training and certification means an investment of time and money. Does that translate into increased income, salary or marketability?

Dementia care is a new nursing specialty, so I don't know if getting additional training or certification in it translates into more pay. But, it definitely translates into better quality care.... And I think — even if it's not showing up in salary surveys yet — that it makes a nurse more marketable. If they are competing against nurses who don't have that kind of training, I think they'll have an edge, and will probably get the job.

For more information:

[National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners](#) (offers 4 levels of certification)

[Crisis Prevention Institute's Dementia Care Specialists Program](#) (offers programs through sponsoring organizations)

["Prevalence of Dementia in the United States: Aging, Demographics and Memory Study"](#)

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About Eileen Beal

Eileen Beal, MA, began covering healthcare and medical education -- writing for HealthCare News and Hospital Report, MDNews, Nursing Weekly, Crains Cleveland Business Journal, Kaiser Permanente, University Hospitals/CASE Medical Center and Cleveland Clinic -- almost 20 years ago. She's written/co-written several health-related books and her articles have appeared in Arthritis Today, BottomLine Health, This Active Life and dozens of other consumer-focused publications and online at WebMD and Vidacura.com.

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Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease that destroys memory and other important mental functions. It's the most common cause of dementia — a group of brain disorders that results in the

loss of intellectual and social skills. These changes are severe enough to interfere with day-to-day life.

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