The Role of the Nurse in Long-term care

Editorial

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to AIGNA’s new publication, JAIGNA, the ‘Journal of the All-Ireland Gerontological Nurses Association’. This ‘Special Edition’ has been designed to mark a significant development in AIGNA’s communication strategy. Keeping in touch with members is a key priority and to date, we have been doing this through our newsletter ‘Feasa’ which has been circulated to a distribution list of almost 2000 groups and individuals with an interest in gerontological nursing. AIGNA is a vibrant organisation and we pride ourselves on moving with the times. In our last newsletter, we tried something different by replacing the paper copy of the newsletter with an electronic (only) version. While there were benefits associated with this in terms of savings and access to a wider audience, there was a feeling among members that the paper publication remained a better option but that the time was right to make the transition to a journal!

Our new journal will be rolled out on a gradual basis and will initially be produced on two occasions per year. Its publication will coincide with major AIGNA activities such as the annual conference which normally takes place in May/June and the Master class which usually occurs in October/November. This ‘Special Edition’ focuses on the role of the nurse in in long-term care. To this end, the journal includes a summary of the research carried out by Hazel Heath, an independent nurse consultant, who was commissioned by AIGNA to explore the role and contribution of the registered nurse in residential care settings for older people in Ireland. This study was completed in 2010 and its findings and recommendations led to further research by Amanda Phelan and Brendan McCormack who recently completed their study on nursing expertise in residential care for older people in Ireland. A summary of this research is also at your fingertips today! The third paper in the long-term care ‘trilogy’ has been written by Brendan McCormack and provides a summary of a collection of articles on the topic which were published in the International Journal of Older People Nursing in 2012. The paper also highlights the importance of academics from around the world working together to develop, implement and evaluate frameworks that recognise the role of the registered nurse in long-term care through the demonstration of person-centred outcomes.

AIGNA’s decision to focus on long-term care represents our commitment to support all nurses who work with older people across the island of Ireland. Current demographic trends raise questions about the future provision of health and social care with a particular focus on reducing morbidity and improving the quality of life and functional independence of older people. Clearly, there is a challenge in identifying what type of care provision will be necessary to respond to these demographic changes. Of equal significance are questions pertaining to who will provide the care required and moreover where this care will be provided.

Ireland has the second highest proportion of people aged 65 years of age and older resident in nursing homes and hospitals (Eurostat, 2011). In the Republic of Ireland, approximately 6% of older people are in nursing homes, in comparison to Northern Ireland, where the figure is 4%
There are approximately 12,000 people living in nursing and residential home in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS, 2012). The 2011 census identified that 31,054 older people were receiving care or residing in ‘communal establishments’ in Ireland (Central statistics Office, 2012).

In Ireland, north and south, current community care policies focus on supporting individuals who need practical, personal or nursing care so that they may remain in their home environment rather than in hospital or residential settings. While this will reduce the number of residential care places, an increase in the number of people with chronic illness and dementia along with the costs associated with caring for these people at home, means that nursing and residential homes will continue to play an important role in the care and support system.

Older people living in long-term care facilities are one of the most disadvantaged population groups insofar as the majority suffer from cognitive impairment and co-existing physical and mental health disorders and disabilities. They are also highly vulnerable as evidenced by recent media reports highlighting examples of poor care and neglect. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that older people who receive high quality care thrive in long-term care settings, there is also a general consensus that more can be done to improve quality of care in this sector. Nurses have a central part in making this a reality and the papers in this issue highlight some of the ways we are already doing this.

The twenty first century will witness even more rapid population ageing that we have seen in the past. The challenge for the future is to ensure that people everywhere will be enabled to age with dignity and continue to participate in society as citizens with full rights. As nurses, we can make this happen and it is worth reminding ourselves of the words of President Obama … Yes we can!

Assumpta Ryan
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References


