

Overview of Gerontological Nursing

Overview of Gerontological Nursing

Focus: caring for older adults across the lifespan, promoting health, preventing disease, and managing age-related conditions.

1. Definition & Scope

Aspect	Description
Gerontological Nursing	Specialized nursing practice that addresses the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of older adults (typically ≥65 years).
Settings	Acute care hospitals, long-term care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, home health, hospice, community health centers, and assisted-living communities.
Population	Older adults with normal aging, chronic illnesses, frailty, dementia, palliative needs, or end-of-life care.

2. Core Competencies (based on the American Association of Colleges of Nursing – Gerontological Nursing Competency Framework)

Domain	Key Skills & Knowledge
A. Professional Role	• Advocate for older adults' rights and autonomy. • Coordinate interdisciplinary care. • Apply evidence-based practice and quality improvement.
B. Clinical Knowledge	• Normal aging physiology and pathophysiology. • Common geriatric syndromes (falls, delirium, polypharmacy, incontinence, pressure injuries).
C. Assessment	• Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment (CGA): functional, cognitive, psychosocial, medication, nutrition, and environmental domains. • Use age-appropriate communication techniques.
D. Communication	• Conduct advance care planning discussions. • Engage family/caregivers as partners.

Overview of Gerontological Nursing

Domain

Key Skills & Knowledge

	• Informed consent, capacity assessment, and surrogate decision making.
E. Ethics & Legal	• Knowledge of elder-specific statutes (e.g., Adult Protective Services, HIPAA, state guardianship laws).
F. Leadership & Education	• Mentor staff on geriatric best practices. • Develop community outreach and health promotion programs.

3. The Aging Process – Key Physiologic Changes

System	Typical Changes	Clinical Implications
Cardiovascular	↓ Maximal heart rate, ↓ systolic BP, stiffening of vessels	Higher risk for hypertension, MI, orthostatic hypotension.
Respiratory	↓ Chest wall compliance, ↓ alveolar surface area	Reduced reserve → higher susceptibility to infections, dyspnea on exertion.
Renal	↓ GFR (~1 mL/min/yr after age 40)	Dose-adjust medications; monitor fluid/electrolyte balance.
Musculoskeletal	Sarcopenia, loss of bone density, decreased proprioception	Falls, fractures, functional decline.
Neurologic	Slower processing speed, reduced neurotransmitter synthesis	Delirium risk, medication sensitivity, cognitive decline.
Gastrointestinal	↓ motility, reduced gastric acid	Constipation, malabsorption, altered drug absorption.
Immune	Immunosenescence (↓ T-cell function)	Higher infection rates, poorer vaccine response.

4. Common Geriatric Syndromes

Syndrome	Definition	Assessment Tools	Primary Interventions
Falls	Unintentional descent to the ground.	Timed Up-and-Go (TUG), Berg Balance Scale.	Fall-risk screening, home safety modifications, strength & balance training, medication review.

Overview of Gerontological Nursing

Syndrome	Definition	Assessment Tools	Primary Interventions
	Acute, fluctuating		
Delirium	disturbance in attention & cognition.	Confusion	