

To whom it may concern

Please excuse the lack of editing etc re the following comments. These comments are necessarily 'off the cuff' as I have only just returned from annual leave and read my emails. Nevertheless, I feel that if I say nothing now, I would be ignoring the needs of older Australians.

As an RN working as a Director of Nursing (5 years) I am concerned about the lack of an appropriate professional nursing presence in many aged care facilities. The issue is not only that there is a shortage of RNs willing to work in aged care. At the heart of the matter is the lack of formal gerontological nursing education of most RNs presently working in the health care industry. Whilst there are numerous tertiary courses available to RNs, many of these nurses are at an age when they have little interest in pursuing such study. Unfortunately this compromises the health of the older people in their care and jeopardises the efficiency of the health care system generally.

I believe that if someone wants to be the leader of an aged care facility (i.e. Director of Care or Director of Nursing or Care Manager or Care Administrator) they require a Masters in the Specialty of Aged Care NURSING. Registered nurses are not the bane of the industry, we are the safeguard to quality care. RNs range freely and necessarily between both the medical model and the social models of care presently being used in the aged care industry. Linking these two models requires great skill to ensure that the balance is just right for the older person. This is what nursing does and this is why we are the glue that holds both the health care and the aged care industries together. If one or the other of these models is allowed dominance, the care of older people and the efficiency of the health care system will suffer.

In essence, and due to the fact that I have to get back to my desk, I believe that the role of the RN in aged care is pivotal to an effective and efficient aged care industry. This role has only a little to do with tasks. The RN role is one of leadership and if we are to take this seriously and admit that the general public places a great deal of value on nursing as a profession, the government will promote the role of the RN in aged care as a plus rather than an impossible (and unwanted?) dream. I suggest that the starting point be that within the decade all Australian hostels and nursing homes be led by RNs who have a Masters degree in their CLINICAL specialty. I believe hospital admissions would be reduced, personal care staff would be well-supported and managed, aged care would become less politically explosive, standards of care would improve even further and newly graduated RNs would have a career pathway. We presently have a good system. It could be better.

Kind regards and best wishes with the enquiry

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