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Analyzing the intention to care for the elderly in associate degree nursing students

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Abstract
The population is aging both nationally and internationally. The senior population is the largest consumer of healthcare in the United States. The National Institute on Aging reports that 85% of those over 65 years of age have at least one chronic medical condition and 60% have two or more. Nursing students have demonstrated a lack of interest in caring for elderly clients. This research project aims to identify factors that impact the associate degree nursing students' intention to work with the elderly population. A quantitative analytical cross-sectional survey research design was employed to determine the association between variables. The constructs of the theory of planned behavior were operationalized using The Willingness to Work with Elderly People Scale to determine their relationship to the associate degree nursing students' intention to care for the elderly. The instrument demonstrated a significant positive correlation between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intention to care for the elderly. Subjective norms had the highest correlation with intention (r = .64, p = .000), (r_s = .62, p = .000). The relationship between attitude and intention was less impressive but still moderately positive (r = .58, p = .000), (r_s = .59, p = .000). The weakest relationship was between perceived behavioral control and intention (r = .58, p = .000), (r_s = .59, p = .000). The demographic variable that demonstrated a weak relationship with intention to care for elderly clients was within the Asian student population (r_{pb} = .17, p = .03). The lowest mean score between all variables is the intention to care for the elderly (16.03±5.8), suggesting a low desire to care for this population. The highest correlation between subjective norms and student intention illustrates faculty influence can potentially impact student work preferences. Future research regarding faculty bias would be impactful. Future research should also include larger samples in various community colleges to improve generalizability.

Keywords: Nursing education, student care for the elderly, higher education nursing, nursing faculty, geriatrics

1. Introduction

The United States (U.S.) population is aging. Individuals of the baby boomer generation were born between 1946 and 1964 and make up the largest cohort consisting of approximately 73 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2019) [18]. As the United States' population continues to age, the population's demographics continue to change (Vespa, 2018) [30]. By 2030, the last of the baby boomer generation will reach age 65, when older adults are estimated to become 20% of the total population (United States Census Bureau, 2019) [18]. By 2034, those over age 65 will outnumber individuals under 18 years of age for the first time (United States Census Bureau, 2019; Vespa, 2018) [30]. By 2060, the country expects to add a million people 100 years old or older, when one in four Americans will be at least 65 years of age (Vespa, 2018) [30]. The aging of the population is not limited to the United States.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2018) [29], the world's population over age 60 will increase by nearly a factor of two from 12% to 22%. Also, by 2050, the world's aged population will reach two billion compared to 900 million in 2015 (WHO, 2018) [29].

The nursing workforce is aging, and the same baby boomer cohort is retiring from the profession (Buchanan *et al*., 2020) [7]. The American Nurses Association (ANA) (n.d.) recognizes the state of the nursing shortage in the U.S., expecting 500,000 nurses to retire by 2022, requiring 1.1 million new nurses to enter the workforce to fill the positions vacated by older nurses and mitigate a nursing shortfall. Additionally, as many as 4.7 million nurses internationally are expected to leave the workforce by 2030 (Buchanan *et al*., 2020) [7].

Aging brings challenges to the individual through varying disease processes and maintaining functionality (Okuyan *et al*., 2020; WHO, 2018) [24, 29]. The aged population frequently finds themselves simultaneously navigating multiple physiologic and psychologic comorbidities, which require various healthcare professionals to attend to their needs (Okuyan *et al*., 2020; WHO, 2018) [24, 29]. Common disease processes associated with age include sensory loss, osteoarthritis, diabetes, depression, dementia, and geriatric syndromes, a predominant predictor of death for the elderly population (WHO, 2018) [29]. Geriatric syndromes, including frailty, incontinence, falls, and delirium, add to the complexity of the older client's care (WHO, 2018) [29].

Associate degree nursing (ADN) programs educate 58% of graduate nurses (Boutin *et al*., 2019) [6]. Baccalaureate pre-licensure programs are more expensive and require a student to be located near a university which is often a deterrent to completing a degree (Smith, 2017) [27]. ADN programs are offered in most the nation's community colleges. Approximately 800 of the 1,100 national community colleges offer this educational pathway to nursing licensure (Smith, 2017) [27]. ADN programs provide a timely and affordable path to becoming an RN, helping alleviate the nursing shortage (Smith, 2017) [27]. According to Smith (2017) [27], in 2016, state boards of nursing licensed 81,633 associate degree nurses compared to 72,637 bachelor's degree nurses.

According to Boutin *et al*. (2019) [6], the ADN cohort of nursing students is unprepared and lacks the knowledge, attitude, and skills necessary for the challenge of caring for the older population. This deficit is related to a scarcity of geriatric content found in the curriculum (Boutin *et al*., 2019) [6]. The United States has led the charge to advance the geriatric curriculum (Hsieh & Chen, 2018a) [16]. In 2010 the AACN recognized the need to create competency statements in gerontology for baccalaureate nursing programs (AACN, 2010; Salin *et al*., 2020) [25]. The National League of Nursing (NLN) is an organization dedicated to excellence in nursing and the support of faculty and leaders across the United States (2021). The NLN provides faculty resources and supports educators to develop a diverse, competent nursing workforce. In collaboration with others, the NLN is providing platforms like the Advancing Care Excellence for Seniors (ACES) platform to help educators provide an effective method of teaching new nurses.

It is well documented that nursing students do not wish to work with the geriatric population after graduation (Che *et al*., 2018; Hunt *et al*., 2020) [9, 17]. The future need for nurses willing to care for our aging population is immense (Che *et al*., 2018) [9]. Complicating the issue is a lack of qualified faculty to educate the up-and-coming workforce (AACN, 2020). Educators are challenged with moderating negative attitudes, stereotypes, misconceptions of eldercare while creating a learning environment that promotes a desire to care for the elderly client.

2. Problem and Research Questions

The problem is there may be a lack of interest of the student nurses in working with a growing senior population and how to motivate student nurse's intention to care for the elderly. The lack of interest by nursing students in geriatrics has been corroborated by research both within the United States and internationally (Che *et al*., 2018; Chi *et al*., 2016) [9, 10]. The shortage of practicing nurses is well established throughout the United States (Haddad *et al*., 2020) [13]. The current cohort of working registered nurses is aging. The baby boomer generation of nurses is retiring from the workforce, adding to the need for willing nurses to care for the elderly population (Buchanan *et al*., 2020; Haddad *et al*., 2020) [7, 13]. The healthcare needs for the elderly will far exceed the services that the current nursing workforce can provide (ANA, n.d.). Without intervention to mitigate the lack of nurses who intend to care for the population coupled with the nursing shortage, the elderly will suffer inadequate care and adverse outcomes (Haddad *et al*., 2020) [13].

As the health care needs of the growing senior population continue to place a strain on the nursing workforce, it is imperative to discover factors that motivate student nurses towards a career in aged care. According to the theory of planned behavior (TPB), three constructs influence one's intentions, including attitudes, subjective norms (SN) or societal pressure to perform a task, and perceived behavioral control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1991) [1]. Evaluating these constructs will benefit nurse educators by identifying critical factors that influence intent to work with older people so faculty can create a learning experience that encourages caring for the elderly.

The purpose of this quantitative analytical cross-sectional survey research study is to identify factors that impact the ADN student's intention to work with the elderly population. This study employs the Willingness to Work with Elderly People Scale (WEPS) survey to examine how nursing students' attitudes, SN, and PBC influence their intention to work with older clients. Understanding the motivations and factors that influence career choices made by the ADN student will inform educators so strategies to encourage intention can be developed.

The following research questions will guide this quantitative cross-sectional survey study:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the associate degree nursing students' attitude towards geriatric clients and intention to care for geriatric clients?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the associate degree nursing students' perceived behavioral control and intention to care for geriatric clients?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the associate degree nursing students' subjective norm (societal pressure) and intention to care for geriatric clients?

RQ4: Is there a relationship between associate degree nursing students' demographics and their intention to care for geriatric clients?

Hypotheses

H1: Associate degree nursing students with positive attitudes

towards geriatric clients have greater intention to care for geriatric clients.

H2: Associate degree nursing students with a high level of perceived behavioral control regarding geriatric clients are more likely to care for geriatric clients.

H3: Associate degree nursing students with supportive subjective norms are more likely to work with geriatric clients.

H4: There is a significant difference between the associate degree nursing students' age, gender, marital status experience with the elderly, ethnicity, semester level, and intention to care for geriatric clients.

3. Materials and Methods

This research utilized a quantitative analytical cross-sectional survey research design. The analytical cross-sectional study method is most suited for this research project. This design is in line with the purpose of this study, which is to investigate relationships between multiple variables without determining causation (Little, 2017) [19]. Utilizing WEPS, numerous variables will be measured simultaneously, including attitude, SN, PBC, and demographic information. Student intention to work with the elderly is assessed concerning these variables. Approximately 450 nursing students were surveyed across four semesters.

3.1. Participant Sampling

A non-probability convenience sample from a nursing program in Florida was employed for this research. Specifically, this population consists of ADN students from a traditional 4-semester program. The sample is an appropriate choice because the ADN population is not represented in the current body of research (Gallo, 2019) [11]. Therefore, the research questions address this specific population to fill the identified knowledge gap. Also, this population is diverse in gender, age, and ethnicity.

The study was conducted at a large community college in Florida. The population consists of ADN students from diverse backgrounds currently enrolled in a 2-year, 4-semester nursing program. Student age is a minimum of 18 years as this is an admission requirement of the college. The college admits approximately 144 students in the Spring and Fall and 40 non-traditional students in the Summer of each year. Students frequently are admitted and then relinquish their placement for various reasons, so admissions vary slightly. Also, some students are not successful each semester and are dismissed from the program or must repeat a course. Therefore, the total enrollment falls between 500-550 students at any specific time. The Summer admissions are not included in the sample. Summer admissions are a transition cohort with a practical nursing license and are transitioning to becoming a registered nurse. Unsuccessful students who are repeating a course will also be eliminated from the sample. Consequently, the sample will consist of only students from the traditional nursing class. The sample size was determined using the G*Power 3.0 program and determined to be 138 nursing students to achieve a 95% confidence interval and a five percent margin of error (Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf [HHU], 2021).

The sample (n = 159) consists of a convenience sample of ADN students, including four semesters attending a community college in Florida. Approximately 450 ADN students were asked to complete the survey. Of the 450 ADN students invited to participate in the study, 162 fully completed the survey. Three surveys were discarded to meet assumption four of Pearson's correlation resulting in a sample size of 159 ADN students.

The minimum age of the sample participants was 19 years, and the maximum was 51 years (M = 27.6, SD 8.09) (see Table 1). Of the 159 respondents, 90.6% were female, and 9.4% were male (see Table 2). Most respondents, 48.4%, were White or Caucasian, followed by 23.9% Hispanic or Latino, 15.7% were Black or African American, 8.8% were Asian or Asian American, 1.3% were multiracial, 0.6% were another ethnicity, and 1.3% chose not to answer (see Table 3). The marital status of the sample includes 60.4% were single, 32.1% were married, 1.3% were divorced, 1.9% were separated, and 4.4% declined to answer (see Table 4). Additionally, 31% of the sample participants were in their first semester, 27.7% in the second semester, 24.1% in the third semester, and 17.1% were in the fourth semester of nursing school (see Table 5).

Table 1

Age		
N	Valid	158
	Missing	1
Mean		27.50
Median		24.00
Mode		20
Std. Deviation		8.096
Minimum		19
Maximum		51

Table 2

Gender	N	%
Female	144	90.6%
Male	15	9.4%

Table 3

Ethnicity	N	%
Another Race	1	0.6%
Asian or Asian American	14	8.8%
Black or African American	25	15.7%
Decline to Answer	2	1.3%
Hispanic or Latino	38	23.9%
Multiracial	2	1.3%
White or Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)	77	48.4%

Table 4

Marital Status	N	%
Decline to Answer	7	4.4%
Divorced	2	1.3%
Married	51	32.1%
Separated	3	1.9%
Single	96	60.4%

Table 5

Semester Level		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First	49	30.8	31.0	31.0
	Second	44	27.7	27.8	58.9
	Third	38	23.9	24.1	82.9
	Fourth	27	17.0	17.1	100.0
	Total	158	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		159	100.0		

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

A survey, Willingness to Work with Elderly People Scale (WEPS), was used to examine how nursing students' attitudes, SN, and PBC influence their intention to work with older clients. Data was aggregated by the online survey platform and 159 nurses participated in the study. The WEPS survey tool was designed to evaluate intention as a dependent variable and the impact of three independent variables, attitudes, SN, and PBC (Momtaz *et al*., 2018) [21]. This research study determined the relationship between the ADN students' attitude, SN, and PBC and intentions to care for the elderly client.

Research Question 1: Attitude and Intention

The degree of correlation was determined by using criteria established by Hinkle *et al*. (1998) [15]. According to Hinkle *et al*. (1998) [15], a correlation of .9 to 1 (-.9 to 1) is classified as a very high correlation between variables, .70 to .90 (-.70 to -.90) is classified as a high correlation between variables, .50 to .70 (-.50 to -.70) is ranked as a moderate correlation between variables, .30 to .50 (-.30 to -.50) is classified as a low correlation between variables, .00 to .30 (.00 to -.30) is ranked as little to no correlation between variables.

For research question one, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .01 level of significance. The relationships between the independent variable attitude and the dependent variable of intention were statistically significant. Using Pearson's correlation, a moderately positive correlation was observed between attitude and intention (r = .58, p = .000) (see Table 6). Additionally, when employing Spearman's rho to analyze the data, a moderately significant correlation was also indicated (r_s = .59, p = .000).

Table 6

Correlations Attitude and Intention		Attitude	Intention
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.578**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	159	159
Intention	Pearson Correlation	.578**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	159	159

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlations			Attitude	Intention
Spearman's rho	Attitude	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.585**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	159	159
	Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.585**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	159	159

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Research Question 2: Subjective Norms and Intention

For research question two, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .01 level of significance. The relationships between the independent variable subjective norms and the dependent variable of intention were statistically significant. Using Pearson's correlation, a moderately positive correlation was observed between subjective norms and intention (r = .64, p = .000) (see Table 7). Additionally, when employing Spearman's rho to analyze the data, a moderately positive significant correlation was also indicated (r_s = .62, p = .000).

Table 7

Correlations Subjective Norms and Intention		Subjective Norms	Intention
Subjective Norms	Pearson Correlation	1	.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	159	159
Intention	Pearson Correlation	.635**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	159	159

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlations			Subjective Norms	Intention
Spearman's rho	Subjective Norms	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.618**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	159	159
	Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.618**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	159	159

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Research Question 3: Perceived Behavioral Control and Intention

For research question three, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .01 level of significance. The relationships between the independent variable PBC and the dependent variable of intention were statistically significant. Using Pearson's correlation low positive correlation was observed between perceived behavioral control and intention (r = .39, p = .000) (see Table 8). Additionally, when employing Spearman's rho to the data, a low positive significant correlation was also indicated (r_s = .38, p = .000).

Table 8

Correlations perceived behavioral control and intention		Perceived behavioral control	Intention
Perceived Behavioral Control	Pearson Correlation	1	.390**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	159	159
Intention	Pearson Correlation	.390**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	159	159

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlations			Perceived Behavioral Control	Intention
Spearman's rho	Perceived Behavioral Control	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.378**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	159	159
	Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.378**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	159	159

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Research Question 4: Demographics and Intention

The relationship between demographic variables and intention were measured using Pearson's correlation and a special application of Pearson's correlation to measure dichotomous and continuous variables called point-biserial correlation. For the independent variable of age and the dependent variable intention, the null hypothesis is retained. There is no relationship between age and intention (r = .13, p = .10). The null hypothesis was retained for the independent variable of gender and the dependent variable of intention using point-biserial correlation. There is no relationship between variables (r_{pb} = .07, p = .42).

New variables were created for race/ethnicity using point-biserial correlation: 0/1 with intention. For the Asian ethnicity, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a weak positive correlation between a student's Asian ethnicity and intention (r_{pb} = .17, p = .03). For the following ethnicities, the null hypotheses are retained as no statistically significant relationship was found between independent and dependent variables: Black/African American (r_{pb} = .04, p = .62), Hispanic or Latino (r_{pb} = .01, p = .92), and White or Caucasian (r_{pb} = -.12, p = .13).

The variable of marital status was recoded into either married (including separated) or not married (single or divorced) to apply Pearson's point-biserial correlation to the data. Participants who chose not to answer were recoded as missing. The null hypothesis of no relationship was retained for this independent variable (r_{pb} = .15, p = .07). The independent variable of working with people over age 65, living with someone over age 65, and whether the student considered themselves religious were recoded into numeric values of 0 or 1. Working with people over age 65, living with someone over age 65, and religiosity had no statistically significant relationship as ordered (r_{pb} = .13, p = .09), (r_{pb} = .13, p = .11), and (r_{pb} =.15, p = .06). Spearman's rho was used to examine the final ordinal variable of semester level against the continuous variable of intention. Again, the null hypothesis of no relationship was retained (r_{rho} = -.05, p = .58).

4. Results

Research Question 1: Attitude and Intention

Research findings were mixed concerning the nursing students' attitudes towards the elderly. For example, multiple studies found generally positive attitudes towards the elderly (Boutin *et al*., 2019; Salin *et al*., 2020) [6, 25]. Still, others found that nursing students studied carried ageist attitudes towards the elderly (Algoso *et al*., 2016; Gallo, 2019; Mohammed & Omar, 2018) [2, 11, 20]. Salin *et al*. (2020) [25] discovered that even when student attitudes were positive, this finding did not always equate to an intention to care for this population. The purpose of research question one was to examine the relationship between the ADN student's attitude towards the elderly and intention to care for them. For research question one, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .01 level of significance. Using Pearson's correlation, a moderately positive correlation was observed between attitude and intention (r = .58, p = .000) (see Table 6). Additionally, when employing Spearman's rho to the data, a moderately positive significant relationship was also indicated (r_s = .59, p = .000) (see table 10). ADN student attitudes were positive (M = 26.3, SD = 3.1) with a possible maximum score of 30 points utilizing the WEPS survey.

Research Question 2: Subjective Norms and Intention

Subjective norms are defined as societal pressure to perform a task (Ajzen, 1991) [1]. Regarding the student nurse population, faculty were influential in shaping the career preferences of nursing students (Garbrah *et al*., 2020) [12]. Various cultural influences were examined within the literature. Many international studies are examined within this review with varying traditional and non-traditional findings. For example, the assumption is that Eastern cultures value caring for the elderly; therefore, the intention to care for them would be higher than Western nursing students. However, the literature review by Koskinen *et al*. (2015) [18] did not confirm this assumption. For research question two, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .01 level of significance. Using Pearson's correlation, a moderately positive correlation was observed between subjective norms and intention (r = .64, p = .000) (see Table 7). Additionally, when employing Spearman's rho to the data, a moderately significant relationship was also indicated (r_s = .62, p = .000).

Research Question 3: PBC and Intention

PBC is defined as the ease and barriers to completing a task (Ajzen, 1991) [1]. Several authors found that a lack of preparedness to care for the elderly and the difficulty of the task impacts intention to care for this population (Algoso *et al*., 2016; Chance *et al*., 2021) [2]. Research question three aimed to examine the correlation between PBC and intention to care for the elderly for the ADN student population. For research question three, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .01 level of significance. Using Pearson's correlation low positive correlation was observed between PBC and intention (r = .39, p = .000) (see Table 8). Additionally, when employing Spearman's rho to the data, a low significant relationship was also indicated (r_s = .38, p = .000).

Research Question 4: Demographic Data and Intention

The purpose of research question four was to evaluate whether demographic data reported by the ADN student correlated in any way with their intention to work with elderly clients. For the variables of age, gender, marital status, working with those over age 65, living with people over age 65, religiosity, and semester level, the null hypothesis was retained as there was no significant relationship. For the variable of ethnicity, only one ethnicity was found to be statistically significant. For the variable of Asian ethnicity, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a weak positive correlation between Asian students and their intention to care for the elderly (r_{pb} = .17, p = .03).

5. Conclusion

Using the constructs of the theory of planned behavior to evaluate the ADN students' intention to care for the elderly has demonstrated a positive correlation between student attitudes, SN, and PBC and intention to care for the elderly client. The most significant positive correlation suggestion that societal pressure is the most persuasive factor impacting intention (r = .64, p = .000), (r_s = .62, p = .000). Regarding attitude the relationship was less impressive but still moderately positive (r = .58, p = .000), (r_s = .59, p = .000). The weakest correlation was found between PBC and intention and is characterized as low positive but still significant (r = .39, p = .000), (r_s = .38, p = .000). The only demographic variable which demonstrated a weak

relationship with intention to care for elderly clients was within the Asian student population (r_{pb} = .17, p = .03). Despite the positive correlations between the three independent variables and intention, the lowest mean score between all variables is intention 16.03±5.8, suggesting that intention to care for the elderly was low.

This research study clarifies for educators the factors that should be considered when working towards increasing ADN students' intention to care for the elderly. Subjective norms were found to have the highest correlation to student intention to work with older clients. Additionally, the independent variable of student attitudes toward the senior client and perceived behavioral control (PBC) also were positively correlated with student intention to care for geriatric clients. Faculty have the most significant influence to impact the independent variables by modeling a positive attitude, creating engaging learning experiences with the elderly, and helping associate degree nursing (ADN) students see the growth potential when choosing a geriatric career track.

The current study demonstrated the highest correlation between SN and intention to care for the elderly. An influential component of SN is the faculty's effect on the nursing students' intention to care for the elderly. Faculty are highly effective in changing student nurses' perception of geriatrics when modeling positive attitudes towards older clients and delivering geriatric content enthusiastically and engagingly (Garbrah *et al*., 2020; Sizer *et al*., 2016) [12, 26]. Likewise, Sizer *et al*. (2016) [26] executed a literature review that presented convincing evidence observing that the opinions of faculty and the students' educational experience significantly impact their perceptions of working with an older client. Unfortunately, some nursing faculty do not value working with geriatric clients and sometimes express ageist attitudes themselves while deterring nursing students from careers in geriatrics (Garbrah *et al*., 2020; Koskinen *et al*., 2015) [12, 18]. Natan *et al*. (2015) [12] discovered that only 19.5% of students reported their faculty encouraged them to consider geriatrics as a career choice. This research is beneficial when educating nursing faculty of the state of the geriatric population, the need for a workforce willing to work in geriatrics, and their influence in forming the opinions of geriatric care in the nursing student.

This research has demonstrated how vital the faculty member's role is to the nursing students' choice of career specialty. Nurse educators should reflect on their own biases and consider how they may negatively impact student intention to care for older clients. This study highlights educators and their potential to mitigate this shortage of nurses willing to care for the growing elderly population. This study demonstrates that the ADN students' intentions to care for elderly clients can increase by improving attitudes, providing faculty support of a geriatric career path, and increasing nursing student competency to care for older clients.

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