



Royal College
of Nursing

Caring in partnership:

older people and
nursing staff working
towards the future





Royal College
of Nursing

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Foreword

Working in partnership with older people

This RCN nursing older people strategy has been developed in partnership with older people from the National Pensioners Convention and Better Government for Older People. RCN members and staff, along with a range of external stakeholders, have worked together to produce a strategy that restates and commits the RCN to best practice for nursing older people. I welcome this work as an example of what can be achieved when nurses work in partnership with older people. It helps us locate our work within the context of what older people tell us they want from nursing. It will ensure that the RCN achieves an integrated, consistent and inclusive way of working that focuses on maximising the potential of the RCN, nursing staff and the older people with whom we work.

Beverly Malone, RN PhD FAAN
RCN General Secretary

1

Introduction

In April 2003 The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) launched its first ever strategic plan, describing its mission, values and objectives:

“The publication of the plan is an exciting landmark in the journey we have embarked upon – the transformation of the organisation.”¹

The RCN is now taking another important step in this journey by developing the companion *Caring in partnership: older people and nursing staff working towards the future*. This document reflects the key importance the RCN attaches to promoting the contribution that nurses can make to meeting the needs of older people, and ensuring their health and wellbeing. It also recognises the importance of nurses working in partnership with older people and other organisations involved in their care in order to meet these objectives.

Caring in partnership has been developed by the RCN Forum for Nurses Working with Older People and the RCN Mental Health and Older People Forum, together with RCN gerontological nursing staff and other key internal and external stakeholders. Ideas have been generated through a series of workshops to which older people and their representative organisations have

contributed. A wider consultation took place at the drafting stage, and we are grateful to the older people and organisations who contributed and helped us shape our thinking. *Appendix 2* gives details of the people who have contributed to the work.

The purpose of this document is to provide a strategic direction to underpin the work of the RCN, and to influence the professional practice of its members who are involved in meeting the needs of older people. We have developed a mission statement to inform the organisation’s work with older people, together with a set of core values and guiding principles.

The document will be used to stimulate and influence at a number of levels including:

- ⦿ priorities in the RCN work programme
- ⦿ policy agenda at local and national level
- ⦿ development and delivery of nurse education programmes
- ⦿ nursing practice in whatever setting this takes place
- ⦿ partnership agenda with older people, their carers/advocates, and other health and social care partners.

2

Understanding the needs of today's older people

The older population in Britain is changing as the *National Service Framework for Older People* stated:

“The population is getting older. The number of people aged over 65 years has doubled in the last 70 years. Older people are living more active lives, spending more money and demanding more services.”²

The older population is now more ethnically diverse and people are living longer. Increasingly, older people want to express their needs and aspirations, particularly in the areas of choice and individual control. These changes present challenges to the traditional approaches used by nurses when caring for older people.

We know from what older people tell us, and a wealth of research evidence, that they want to remain as independent for as long as they possibly can. They want to continue to maintain their social networks, contributing to their families and their communities, and where possible continuing to live in their own homes.³ For many older people exercising real choice about how to live in later life remains the reality. However, for others, increased frailty and illness pose a real threat to maintaining independence and wellbeing. The likelihood of becoming frail or ill increases significantly as people age, and is particularly true for people aged over 85. It can place limits on a person's capacity to live life to the full. The 2001 census found more than half of all people aged 75 to 84 reported that they have a long-term illness that limits their daily activities. This rises to over 70% of people aged over 85.⁴ Many older people have to manage more than one chronic condition at the same time.

Nurses are often engaged in helping older people manage these chronic illnesses. They have a crucial role in supporting older people to develop strategies that enable them to maintain their independence and live as full a life as possible. This requires nurses to develop their skills in the management of chronic disease, as well as in how best to support older people to help them maintain their confidence and

engagement with the community. Nurses also have an important health promotion role by making it possible for older people to understand better how to maintain their own health and fitness levels.

“... two thirds of patients cared for in hospital wards are over the age of 65. Some 9 out of 10 people seen by community nurses are older people.”⁵

Yet most nurses do not view themselves as specialists in the care of older people, and there is a danger that some of the essential needs of older people may not be met in situations where nurses are focusing more narrowly on the acute nursing needs of their patients. Delivering person-centred, holistic care is challenging in the face of continued pressures to maintain hospital throughput and to avoid delayed discharges. Further, challenges for nurses concern the need to ensure that older people have access to the range of treatments that they may need, and to be vigilant in helping to root out age discrimination in the NHS.⁶ It is equally important that treatments are delivered in a way that maximises benefit. For an older person, as for any other patient, *how* care is delivered is often as important as the nature of the treatment itself.

The level of vulnerability and ill health of some older people may mean that they require longer-term nursing care. This could be either in hospital, in a care home or at home. Here the nursing challenge is to find ways of supporting the older person that enables them to continue exercising choice and control over the way they live. In preparing for the later stages of life it is particularly important to ensure that dignity and individuality are promoted and protected.

The growth in the very elderly population has also resulted in an increase in the numbers and proportions of older people with dementia and other mental health needs. Many difficulties are exacerbated by a failure, particularly in primary care, to diagnose and respond to these mental health needs. This can result in considerable pressure on carers and breakdown in care arrangements.⁷ Nurses have an important role not only

in assessment and diagnosis, but also by providing specialist input to flexible care packages.

There are also strong economic arguments for ensuring older people have access to high quality nursing care and effective multi-disciplinary assessment. As Derek Wanless remarked in his review of the NHS:

“Properly targeted assessment and active care management promotes older people’s independence through preventing deterioration and managing crisis. It may reduce demand for service through assessing need more accurately and by ensuring services remain appropriate to needs.”⁸

The Wanless report, *Securing our future health: taking a long-term view*, set out a vision of the future NHS workforce, highlighting the key role for nurses:

“... many of the routine contacts between patients and the health service will be provided by nurses or other health and social care professionals in community-based settings.”⁹

In summary, the nursing profession has a key role in contributing to the health and wellbeing of an increasingly ageing population. In order to meet the needs of older people effectively, nurses must recognise that older people, even the most vulnerable and frail, want to exercise choice and control over the care they receive. Older people increasingly want and expect professionals to recognise and respect their wish to maintain their identity and independence – and to be partners in their care alongside the professionals.

In order to support nurses in maximising their contribution to the care of older people, the RCN has worked with its members, RCN staff, older people and a variety of organisations to develop a set of shared principles. The promotion of these ways of working should increase the likelihood of positive experiences of nursing, both by older people and nurses.

This document is not necessarily saying anything new about what older people should be able to expect from nurses. However, it reaffirms the RCN’s commitment to ensuring high quality care for older people that takes account of changing needs and expectations.

3

Developing our nursing practice: our vision for the future

In developing *Caring in partnership* the RCN is aware of, and has built on, the considerable work that has already taken place nationally to raise standards in health and social care services for older people. A list of the most relevant documents is contained in *Appendix 1*.

Our mission statement

In the context of person-centred care

The RCN, through its members and staff, will work in partnership with older people and other stakeholders to ensure that the needs of older people are recognised and are met in a way which values older people, maximises their potential and protects and supports those who are vulnerable.

This is our mission as registered nurses working with older people

Our values

The RCN's *Strategic plan*¹⁰ sets out its mission, describes its values, and details five key strategic aims. The values that have been adopted by the RCN provide the foundation for members' work with older people. They are:

"In all we do we will seek to be:

- © *inclusive*
- © *listening*
- © *caring*
- © *respectful*."¹¹

Therefore, in meeting the nursing needs of older people nurses will seek to be:

- © **Inclusive**
Nurses have an important role in helping to root out and challenge the ageist attitudes that are still prevalent in health and social care. They can and will *champion* the needs of older people to ensure access to appropriate treatments and services.

An inclusive approach also involves recognising and valuing the contribution that others make in delivering treatment and care. Providing effective nursing care for older people necessitates working in *partnership* with older people, their carers and other health and social care professionals and volunteers.

- © **Listening**

Effective, person-centred care requires consideration of *the person behind the illness*. This is particularly important in nursing older people who may experience a crisis due to trauma, frailty and ill health, or dementia. Older people require the time and opportunity to express their views and to have their needs dealt with in an *holistic way*. Providing *clear information* allows older people, their relatives, carers and/or advocates to ask informed questions, and to make important choices about their care.

- © **Caring**

Older people will experience good care both through the *relationships* that are established with those who nurse them and also the *content of the care* they receive. Older people may often need help with *personal care, and with eating and drinking*. These are often the key steps in the recovery process.

- © **Respectful**

All patients and residents must have their basic human rights to *dignity, privacy and informed choice* protected at all times. For some older people, particularly those with dementia or cognitive impairment, who may be unable to ensure these rights for themselves, nurses have a key role in ensuring that services are always provided with *compassion and empathy*.

All older people are individuals. Their distinctive needs and wishes reflect differences in *ethnicity, religion, culture, language, gender, marital status and other personal circumstances*. Nurses need to be sensitive to these factors and to respond appropriately.

4

Principles to underpin practice

The RCN has defined nursing in terms of:

“... the use of clinical judgement in the provision of care to enable people to improve, maintain, or recover health, to cope with health problems and to achieve the best possible quality of life, whatever their disease or disability, until death.”¹²

This is reinforced by the 1998 International Council of Nurses’ statement on the nursing care of older people:

“The goal of nursing care in working with older people is to achieve optimal health, wellbeing, and quality of life as determined by those receiving care or consistent with the values and wishes of the individual.”¹³

The five key principles developed for this strategy must underpin the work of nursing older people. They are:

- ⊙ valuing older people
- ⊙ maximising potential
- ⊙ ensuring good quality physical, mental and emotional care
- ⊙ enabling through information
- ⊙ working in partnership.

We explore each principle in turn.

⊙ **Valuing older people**

Nurses will demonstrate this by:

- challenging discrimination and championing the needs and rights of older people
- recognising and responding to diversity, ensuring that the care provided is sensitive to the needs of the individual and takes full account of their religious, language, ethnic and cultural requirements. Some older people may be doubly at risk of discrimination as a result of their age and ethnicity
- preserving the dignity of older people; listening and responding to their views; and developing an understanding of the whole person
- ensuring that where communication difficulties exist, ways are found to enable older people and/or their advocates to contribute as fully as possible to decision-making processes.

⊙ **Maximising potential**

Nurses will work to maximise the potential of older people by:

- being sensitive to the fact that most people do not want to be dependent on others but wish to optimise their independence
- working with individuals to help them recognise their potential and find ways of overcoming areas of difficulty
- recognising that helping older people to regain and maintain their confidence and their links with family and social networks are often crucial parts of a successful recovery process, but that this takes time
- ensuring that older people have access to a range of help to meet their needs by working in a multi-disciplinary way with colleagues, and where appropriate signposting older people and their carers to other available care
- recognising that the safety of older people should be assured, the promotion of independence often involves some managed risk-taking that needs to be openly discussed with older people and their carers.

Nurses will maximise their own potential to respond to the needs of older people by:

- developing an understanding of the ageing process and the diseases that can be associated with it
- having a knowledge and understanding of the research and evidence base that underpins the practice of caring for older people
- contributing to the development of effective ways that facilitate the way that nurses, students and care assistants learn about the skills necessary to work with older people
- helping to break down the stigma attached to nursing older people by challenging negative images of older people and highlighting the positive rewards for nurses working in this area
- being aware of the other professionals and agencies that can contribute to the care of older people. Working actively in partnership with them, respecting their expertise, and accessing their skills where appropriate.

© **Ensuring good quality physical, mental and emotional care**

Nurses will achieve this by:

- recognising that older people may need help and encouragement to eat, drink and maintain their personal hygiene, and providing that help in a sensitive and appropriate manner
- alleviating pain and discomfort and recognising that it is appropriate for the individual to define their own levels of tolerance of pain and distress. Particular consideration needs to be given to people who are unable to communicate their feelings. Ways must be found to understand their requirements in such situations
- recognising that older people will need help and encouragement and time to discuss their feelings about their illness
- working in ways that encourage older people to take responsibility by assessing risks and providing support
- offering informed choices to individuals so that they can be involved in deciding how their physical, mental and emotional care needs will be met
- understanding and responding to the special needs of people with dementia, who may be particularly distressed by the move to unfamiliar surroundings such as hospitals. Seek specialist support where this will facilitate the delivery of more appropriate care
- recognising that supporting older people at home can result in them becoming isolated. Therefore, care planning needs to focus on meeting the needs of the whole person.

© **Enabling through information**

Nurses will achieve this by:

- helping people to understand their condition and its treatment, and to become fully involved in decisions about their care and treatment
- helping people to understand the range of options that might be available, particularly if they are being asked to make major decisions that may significantly change their lives, such as giving up their home and entering long-term care. Giving them time to make such decisions and ensuring that appropriate help and support is available to them

- asking people for feedback on the care that they have received and responding to that feedback in a non-defensive way that informs the future delivery of services
- ensuring that vulnerable older people have ready access to suitable advocacy and support services
- enabling the early diagnosis of dementia and depression, and helping people to access information about their condition and the help available, and to understand their rights, for example under mental health legislation.

© **Working in partnership**

Nurses will promote this by:

- recognising that no single profession has a monopoly in providing care for older people. The needs of individuals, particularly where these are complex, require a well co-ordinated multi-disciplinary response and meaningful participation of the older person and/or their advocate
- forming alliances with older people to ensure that they are true partners in their own care planning and delivery, and looking for opportunities to promote the role of the expert patient
- working with relatives and carers to ensure that they are informed, fully consulted and can contribute their expertise and understanding of the individual's needs. This involves recognising that many carers may themselves be older people and may need help, support and time to contribute their views
- working with other professionals to ensure that care is co-ordinated, and that older people have access to the necessary therapeutic input to aid their recovery and maximise their potential
- providing support and supervision to other care staff such as health care assistants and social care workers who are working with older people
- exerting their influence to ensure that the needs of older people in the wider population are recognised and responded to
- identifying and articulating the contributions that expert nurses can make.

5

Moving forward together

The challenge now is to make these aspirations a reality, and to build on the current body of good practice. In this context, we have set ourselves the following strategic objectives and milestones to take the RCN through to 2007.

Our strategic objectives and milestones

Aims	Objectives	Milestones	To be achieved by	
To ensure that older people are valued	A. RCN will actively root out age discrimination in its own organisation	A1	Review RCN human resources strategy to ensure it is not age discriminatory	2004
		A2	Work with older people to examine our publicity material for negative stereotypes of older people	2005
		A3	Examine the language and internal workings of the RCN to ensure no stereotypes of older people are explicit or implied	2004
	B. RCN will work with other key stakeholders to portray positive images of ageing	B1	Work with older people and others to disseminate positive images of ageing	2004
		C. RCN will raise the profile of older person abuse to ensure members are alert to its detection and respond appropriately	C1	Review existing RCN older person abuse guidance with other interested parties to identify gaps and priorities for nursing practice
	C2		Build on the review to develop a framework for good practice for wider dissemination	2005
	D. RCN will work with older people to develop its range of services for nurses working with older people	D1	Work in partnership with older people to review the RCN nursing older people strategy and progress reports	2005/2006
		D2	Involve older people in the development of conferences	2004
		D3	Work with older people in the development of RCN publications	2005

Aims	Objectives	Milestones	To be achieved by
To maximise the potential of older people and nurses	E. RCN will support nurses in developing person-centred assessment processes that recognise the need to develop an holistic view of older peoples' needs	E1 Develop a new edition of the RCN nursing older people assessment tool to reflect the contemporary policy on assessment, and ensure it is linked into the single/unified assessment process	2004
		E2 Develop paper and electronic versions of the tool for wide dissemination	2004
		E3 Provide guidance, advice and training on its use	2004/2005
	F. RCN will work with its forums and older people to develop a more positive approach to risk management	F1 In partnership with older people the RCN older people's forums will explore ways that they can promote practice that maximises potential	2005
		F2 Prepare new material on rights, risks and the use of restraint	2004
	G. RCN will influence the learning and practice development of nurses so that they can maximise the potential of older people	G1 Promote the RCN BSc (Hons) in Gerontological Nursing to increase its take up	2004
		G2 Develop a new edition of outcome indicators for nursing in continuing care	2004
		G3 In partnership with Government nurses and RCN leadership programme explore the potential for providing older people-specific clinical and political leadership programmes	2004
		G4 Work with representatives of NHS and primary care trusts, and the independent sector to develop a programme for rotational opportunities for nurses to move between acute and community settings to broaden experience and understanding	2006
		G5 Collaborate with Help the Aged to promote the newly-established Bursaries and Awards (RCN BSc in Gerontological nursing) for person-centred practice	2004

Aims	Objectives	Milestones	To be achieved by
<p>To ensure the delivery of good quality, physical, mental and emotional care</p>	<p>H. RCN will encourage its members to contribute to the development of high quality models of nursing</p>	<p>G6 Develop the Dementia Nursing Bursary for person-centred practice in community care</p>	<p>2004</p>
		<p>G7 Work in partnership with other agencies to continue lobbying and influencing UK policies on the funding of nursing and long-term care</p>	<p>2004</p>
		<p>H1 Contribute to the regeneration of the local community teaching nursing home project in north east London with City University</p>	<p>2004/2005</p>
		<p>H2 Contribute actively to developing creative ways of anticipating and responding to needs of older people through the promotion of good practice</p>	<p>2004/2005/2006</p>
	<p>I. RCN will develop and promote the concept of person-centred practice</p>	<p>I1 Utilise opportunities such as conference presentations, guidance and advice to promote person-centred ways of working</p>	<p>2004</p>
		<p>I2 Influence the education curriculum and practice placements for student nurses working with older people</p>	<p>2004/2005</p>
		<p>I3 Gather evidence of the impact of contemporary policies that influence the delivery of person-centred care</p>	<p>2004</p>
		<p>I4 Work with the Health and Social Care Advisory Service in its Acute Care for Older People project</p>	<p>2004</p>
		<p>I5 Explore with Government how RCN can promote best practice in work with older people</p>	<p>2004/2005</p>
	<p>J. RCN will promote the role of nurses in securing health and wellbeing in older age</p>	<p>J1 Develop an information toolkit for nurses and older people on sex and sexuality</p>	<p>2004/2005</p>
		<p>J2 Develop an RCN position statement on the nurse's role in promoting health and wellbeing in older age by working with older people and partner nursing organisations</p>	<p>2005</p>

Aims	Objectives	Milestones	To be achieved by
To empower older people through the provision of good quality information	K. RCN will ensure that its own information is made available to patients, carers and advocates in an appropriate way	K1 Produce material in a range of formats that can be accessed by older people	2006
		K2 Review and update existing material	2006
To promote effective partnership working	L. RCN will work in partnership with older people to develop its policies and priorities	L1 Develop arrangements to involve older people in RCN forums to contribute to shaping priorities	2004/2005
		M1 Review modules on the RCN BSc GN course in collaboration with older people	2005/2006
	M. RCN will develop confident practitioners who can work in partnership with older people	M2 Encourage providers of education to develop their material in partnership with older people	2005/2006
		N1 Promote the roles of consultant nurses and older people specialist nurses	2004/2005/2006
	N. RCN will develop confident practitioners who can work as members of multi-agency and multi-professional teams	N2 Provide support and networking opportunities for consultant nurses and older people specialist nurses	2004/2005
		N3 In partnership with Help the Aged and local providers the RCN will seek funding to undertake an evaluative study on the outcomes of the older people specialist nurse roles	2004/2005
O1 RCN older people's forums to disseminate examples of good practice		2004/2005	

6

Monitoring our progress

In *Caring in partnership: older people and nursing staff working towards the future* we have set out our strategic aims and objectives. Now we have to ensure that our efforts result in real change for older people through improvement in nursing practice. We intend to review our strategy on a regular basis, and to update it as appropriate. We will do this in partnership with older people, who are in the best position to advise us if anything has changed. We will also involve other key stakeholders, and particularly those with whom we need to work closely in achieving our objectives.

The responsibility for reviewing our strategy will rest with the RCN Forum for Nurses Working with Older People and the Mental Health and Older People Forum. The first review will take place in January 2005 when we will produce a progress report.

We are very grateful to all those members, older people and others who have helped in the production of *Caring in partnership*.

7

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