

The Aging Mind, Body, and Spirit: A Novel Interdisciplinary Curriculum for Acute Care Staff

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Environment

In 2016, the interdisciplinary team members of Saint Vincent Hospital's (SVH) Nurses Improving the Care of Health System Elders (NICHE) Steering Committee completed the NICHE Leadership Training Program.

The NICHE Steering Committee developed several goals to meet its mission of implementing evidence-based geriatric care and creating patient/family-centered environments:

- Implement a screening tool for early identification of patients at risk for delirium or already experiencing hypoactive or hyperactive delirium
- Reduce polypharmacy
- Promote mobility to prevent functional decline and reduce discharges to STR/SNFs
- Implement a specialized volunteer team to assist with patient engagement and mitigate delirium risk
- Employ the use of sensory and cognitive tools to engage the patients and prevent further mental status changes
- Cohort patients that meet at-risk criteria to refurbished, geriatric-friendly NICHE units
- Train all inpatient nursing and therapy staff on NICHE principles

Implementation

No curriculum existed at St. Vincent's for training new and/or longtime RNs, PCAs, volunteers, PTs, OTs, and SLPs about the unique care needs of hospitalized older adults – specifically, their cognitive, functional, and emotional needs. The interprofessional NICHE Steering Committee developed a novel curriculum for teaching interdisciplinary learners about the aging mind, body, and spirit, by using the team's collective expertise buttressed by guidance from the NICHE Knowledge Center. Sixteen hours of original content was developed and delivered using various methodologies (e.g., role play, empathy sessions, small groups, mini-lectures):

- Session #1: **The Aging Mind** –interdisciplinary team training for non-pharmacological/behavioral strategies to prevent/minimize behavioral symptoms of delirium and dementia.
- Session #2: **The Aging Body** – the perils of hospital-acquired immobility
- Session #3: **The Aging Spirit** –palliative care, hospice, and elder abuse
- Session #4: **Putting It All Together** – formal graduation ceremony (including diplomas/pins) to cultivate a sense of pride and accomplishment

Results

To date, (65) staff members have been trained by the NICHE interdisciplinary faculty who are nurse educators, geriatricians, PTs, OTs, SLPs, and palliative care nurse practitioners.

As an adjunct to the NICHE plan, several hospital volunteers were also trained on the use of “delirium bins.” These bins were developed by our lead occupational therapist and speech language pathologist, and include multisensory items (e.g., tactile “toys,” crossword puzzles, and word searches) and reorienting items (tabletop clocks, etc.). These items are available for staff and volunteers to use while interacting with vulnerable, at-risk patients.

The St. Vincent’s NICHE Steering Committee plans to run three trainings each year and a smaller session during new employee orientation. The overarching goal is to train every care provider and volunteer in the acute setting.

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