Factors Motivating RNs to Attain Certification in Gerontological Nursing
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**Problem:** Professional certification is an RN attribute correlated with improved patient care outcomes. Nationally, a less that optimum number of RNs have certification in their area of clinical practice.

**Evidence:** Professional certification is formal recognition of specialized knowledge, skills and experience demonstrated by achievement of standards by a nursing specialty to promote high quality patient care. Although numerous studies have demonstrated a positive link between certified nurses and improved patient care, less than 25% of nurses possess certification. Despite the fact that people age 65 and older represent the largest growing sector of the U.S., gerontological nursing is one of the least certifications attained by nurses working in hospitals. In order to increase the number of nurses with professional certification, nurse leaders must first determine what motivates nurses to become certified.

**Strategy:** In 2008, distressed by evidence that nurses did not feel they knew enough about age-appropriate care of the elderly, a CNO challenged her staff to augment their knowledge, skill and attitude related to caring for the elderly and attain professional certification in Gerontological Nursing. This innovative initiative was referred to as "Getting Smart About Getting Old".

**Practice Change:** RNs with certification in Gerontological Nursing are recommending structure and process changes that are making the hospital environment an elder-friendly place to receive healthcare.

**Evaluation:** Thus far, 81 RNs have attained certification. In 2011, an IRB approved nursing research study was conducted to determine what factors motivated these nurses to attain Gerontological Certification. Herzberg’s Motivational Theory and Bandura’s Self Efficacy Theory were used as the conceptual framework for the study.

**Results:** Of the 81 RNs certified in Gerontological Nursing, 48 (59%) are direct care nurses and 33 (41%) are nurse leaders. All of the RNs are female. Certain clinical areas, such as: the OR and ICU, have many certified nurses. Whereas, other clinical areas, such as: the Emergency Department, have none. Direct care nurses are motivated by intrinsic factors, such as: personal satisfaction and clinical competence. Nurse leaders are motivated by extrinsic factors, such as: employer recognition and marketability.

**Recommendations:** As delineated in the newest report by the Institute of Medicine (2010) titled, The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, the nursing profession can and should play a fundamental role in transforming the American healthcare system. In order to improve patient care outcomes, more nurses need to attain professional certification, especially in the growing area of gerontological nursing.

**Lessons Learned:** In order to inspire RNs to attain professional certification, nurse leaders must be knowledgeable regarding motivational factors. Findings indicate that direct care nurses and nurses in leadership roles are motivated by different factors. Therefore, more than one strategy needs to be deployed in order to successful motivate nurses in different roles to attain professional certification.