The American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ASPAN) advocates for an environment of safety in which perianesthesia registered nurses deliver quality care to the vulnerable older adults undergoing anesthesia and surgery. Foremost, perianesthesia registered nurses have the responsibility of recognizing the unique challenges of age-related pathophysiologic changes, altered illness presentations and diminished physiologic reserve of the older adult patient. ASPAN promotes diverse older adult educational offerings that span the perianesthesia continuum of care featuring holistic nursing care for the culturally diverse adults. Perianesthesia registered nurses must demonstrate competencies in recognizing these older adult age-specific pathophysiologic effects so that the physiologic health state can be maximized and adapted to prevent complications and decrease risks, (such as polypharmacy and the older adult patient’s response to anesthesia agents and adjuncts). Effective nursing care of the older adult requires a specialized knowledge base that is developed through evidence-based nursing practice, education, research and leadership. It is to be remembered that the care received the day of surgery has long-range effects on the functional status of the aging patient.

Background

The United States Census Bureau has reported that in the year 2013, there were an estimated 44.7 million people age 65 and older in the United States. This accounted for 14.1 percent of the total population.1 In 2011, the “baby boom” generation began to turn 65 and by 2030, it is projected that one in five people will be 65 or older.2 The growth of this age group will have a dramatic impact on healthcare providers and present many challenges for perianesthesia nursing practice. Perianesthesia registered nurses will require advanced competencies in understanding the physiology of aging and anatomical changes which affect the geriatric population. During the preanesthesia assessment, potential problems must be identified which may include: cognitive impairment, age related diseases, skin integrity, polypharmacy, pain management, promotion of sleep and comfort, the risk for adverse drug reactions and interactions, nutrition and the lack of home support. Discharge teaching and planning must begin with the initial interview. The geriatric patient will require additional time when being prepared for surgery. Perianesthesia registered nurses need to identify language and communication barriers to enhance communication skills that promote independence, autonomy and positive outcomes for the geriatric perianesthesia patient throughout the care continuum.

The older adult is defined as age 65 years or older and when one qualifies for retirement income. Older adults are also placed into specific age groups. The young-old is age 65 to 74; the old is age 75 to 84; and the old-old is 85 or older.3 The perianesthesia team must advocate for the special needs of these older
adults to ensure patient safety and improved healthcare outcomes in the geriatric population being served.

**Position**

It is the position of ASPAN that perianesthesia registered nurses seek knowledge of and develop skills in the care of the older adult patient to promote positive outcomes in perianesthesia settings.

To promote awareness of changes of aging:

- Promote Patient and Family-Centered Care\(^a\)
  - During preanesthesia assessment with the help of the family, potential problems must be identified. (See Practice Recommendation 2.)
  - Discharge teaching and planning must begin at the initial interview with the patient and family at the bedside encouraging the family to participate in the patient’s continuum of care.
- Integrate issues related to older adult considerations into perianesthesia education, research and clinical practice
- Encourage research activities related to perianesthesia older adult considerations
- Develop guidelines to support and enhance knowledge and skills in the care of the older adult patient

**Expected Outcomes**

Perianesthesia registered nurses will be respectful, knowledgeable and insightful of special considerations related to aging when caring for older adult patients.

All perianesthesia registered nurses will familiarize themselves with and inform other members of the healthcare team of this position statement.

ASPN, as the voice of perianesthesia nursing, must externalize this information by sharing this position with regulatory agencies and professional organizations that interface with the perianesthesia nursing specialty.

**Approval of Statement**

This statement was recommended by a vote of the ASPAN Board of Directors on November 2, 2007, in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico and approved by a vote of the ASPAN Representative Assembly on May 4, 2008, in Grapevine, Texas.

This position statement was updated and revised at the October 2015 meeting of the Standards and Guidelines Strategic Work Team in Fort Worth, Texas.

---

\(^{a}\)Patient and Family-Centered Care (PFCC) refers to the delivery of healthcare and supportive services that considers an older adult’s needs, goals, preferences, cultural traditions, family situation and values. It includes the person and the family at the center of the care team, along with health and social service professionals and direct care workers.
REFERENCES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Doerflinger DM. Older adult surgical patients: presentation and challenges. AORN J. 2009;90(2);223-241.


