



A Position Statement on the Older Adult

According to the United States Census Bureau, by 2030, all baby boomers will be over the age of 65. In addition, by 2035, there will be 78.0 million people over the age of 65 expanding the size of the older population.¹ Approximately 60% of older adults, defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as Medicare-eligible resident persons aged over 75,² manage two or more chronic conditions.³ The growth of this age group will have a dramatic impact on members of the healthcare team 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 older adult 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 older adult patient may 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 older adult perianesthesia patient throughout the care continuum.

Purpose

The American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ASPAN) exists to define and promote principles of safe, quality nursing practice including care of the older adult in the perianesthesia environment. 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 and supports diverse older adult care and the necessary background knowledge needed to provide care that spans the perianesthesia continuum and addresses holistic nursing care for culturally diverse adults.

Position

It is the position of ASPAN that perianesthesia registered nurses advocate for an environment of safety in which quality care is delivered to vulnerable older adults undergoing anesthesia and surgery. Perianesthesia registered nurses must demonstrate knowledge and skills in recognizing the 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, clinical inquiry, and leadership. It is to be remembered that the care

received leading up to and including the day of surgery has long-range effects on the functional status of the aging patient. To ensure the safe and effective care of the older adult, perianesthesia nurses must:

- Promote person and family-centered care⁴
 - During preanesthesia assessment with the help of the family, potential problems must be identified (See Practice Recommendation for Components of Assessment and Management for the Perianesthesia Patient.)
 - 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, clinical inquiry, 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
- Utilize appropriate principles that apply to assessing and caring for the older adult
- To ensure the safe and effective care of the older adult, perianesthesia nurses must:
 - Use guidelines as recommended by the American Geriatrics Society (AGS) such as the Beers Criteria®, to improve the safety and management of medications for older adults^a
- Encourage patients/caregivers to express concerns regarding anesthesia, surgery, or procedure to discuss with surgeons or anesthesia providers

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.

ASPAN, 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 2019 meeting of the Standards and Guidelines Strategic Work Team in Dallas, Texas.

^aThe American Geriatrics Society (AGS) recommends the use of guidelines, such as the Beers Criteria, to improve the safety and management of medications for older adults.⁵



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2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Indicator definitions – older adults. Accessed July 8, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/cdi/definitions/older-adults.html>
3. Older adults. Healthy People. 2020. Accessed July 8, 2020. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/older-adults>
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5. American Geriatrics Society. 2019 Updated AGS Beers Criteria for potentially inappropriate medication use in older adults. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2019;67:674 - 694. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.15767>

ADDITIONAL READING

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