The role and prospects of gerontological nurses

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The older adult population is increasing worldwide, and in response to this demographic change, the United Nations has set sustainable development goals for the next 10 years through the decade of healthy aging (2021–2030) and is calling for global cooperation to improve the lives of older adults, their families, and the communities they live in [1]. The World Health Organization is developing implementation strategies for these goals by setting action areas, such as an age-friendly environment, combating ageism, integrated care, and long-term care [2]. In particular, the role of nurses in the areas of integrated and long-term care is significant. In addition, as they age, older adults experience numerous physiological changes leading to physical and mental decline, necessitating an expanded role for nurses in maintaining and managing their health. The physical decline of older adults can often result in various challenges, such as visual impairment, hearing loss, cognitive impairment, malnutrition, mobility problems, depression and anxiety disorders, urinary incontinence, and falls; as such, there is a need to implement integrated management of older adults through the nurses [2]. In Korea, in particular, community care programs have been established to build a system of integrated elder care in the community, and the role of nurses is expected to expand from hospital-centered to community-based [3].

Despite the need for gerontological nursing competencies, some nursing colleges in Korea do not operate gerontological nursing as a mandatory course in the nursing curriculum [4]. It is time to refine the curriculum that reflects the characteristics of gerontological nursing, such as the physical and psychological changes, cognitive function changes, characteristics of the geriatric diseases, the government’s policies for older adults, etc. In addition, most patients in the clinics and hospitals might be older adults, so it is imperative to prioritize enhancing nurses’ understanding and competence in gerontological care. Nurses who have not experienced gerontological nursing practice may find it difficult to provide nursing that reflects the characteristics of older adults and may be reluctant to work in the gerontological nursing field.

As the older population is expected to increase, there is a need to increase nurses’ gerontological nursing competence and present role models of nurses who care for older adults. This is the purpose of the Journal of Korean Gerontological Nursing. Since the birth of the journal 25 years ago, the Korean Gerontological Nursing Society and the Journal of Korean Gerontology Nursing have been providing evidence based on the specificity of gerontological nursing. We hope this journal will provide future directions for gerontological nursing by providing evidence-based insights and making policy suggestions.
Authors' contribution

All work was done by DJ.

Conflict of interest

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REFERENCES


