

nursing specialty

Aged Care Nursing

Aged Care is one of the fastest growing specialties in the Australian health care system. This is because the proportion of people over 55 years is increasing compared with people in the younger age brackets and also people are living longer than at any other time in history. As a consequence, the demand for services in the public health system and the private sector is set to increase in the decades ahead.

Registered and enrolled nurses working in Aged Care are an especially talented breed of individuals who choose to work with older people, many of whom have some of the most complex health issues and major social challenges to face. For example, as age advances mobility is often reduced. Key senses such as sight and hearing are likely to deteriorate. Acute health problems can become chronic ones and chronic conditions can have acute exacerbations requiring hospitalisation. Medications taken for long periods of time can become ineffective or create health problems of their own. Most commonly, as people age they are more prone to falls and other accidents.

In order to meet the health needs of this sector of the population, Aged Care is provided in both acute and sub acute settings in hospitals and also as an ambulatory service for the elderly in their homes. Collaboration with a range of other specialties and agencies occurs to ensure that the management of the elderly person in both the community and hospital settings is appropriate and optimal.

Aged Care Services

In South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Health (SESIH), Aged Care is provided in many of our facilities with the services organised using a number of different delivery models.

These include:

- Acute inpatient units
- Specialist behavioural units
- Inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation units.
- Aged Care Service Emergency Teams (ASET)

- Rapid assessment units
- Dementia Day Care Units
- Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAT)
- Community health teams

Acute inpatient units and behaviour units

These are located at St Vincent's Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital, St George Hospital, Sutherland Hospital and Wollongong Hospital.

Inpatient and community based rehabilitation

These are located at St Vincent's Hospital, Calvary Hospital, Sutherland Hospital, Bulli Hospital, Coledale Hospital, Milton Hospital, Kiama Hospital and Port Kembla Hospital.

ASET teams

These operate from St Vincent's Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital, St George Hospital, Sutherland Hospital, Wollongong Hospital and Shoalhaven Hospital.

ACAT services

These operate from Calvary Hospital, Sutherland Hospital, War Memorial Hospital, St Vincent's Hospital, Port Kembla Hospital, Shoalhaven Hospital and Berry Hospital.

Other community and ambulatory services

These are provided from most facilities across the Area.

Dementia specific units and services

These operate from Calvary Hospital, Sutherland Hospital, Port Kembla Hospital, St Vincent's Hospital and Prince of Wales Hospital. In addition, Garrawarra Centre is a 120-bed residential aged care facility for residents with dementia exhibiting and challenging behaviours.

Within SESIH there are also many Aged Care specialty networks and interest groups including dementia, falls, research forums as well as clinical practice forums.

Opportunities for nurses

The Aged Care services across SESIH are supported by a multidisciplinary team of health professionals, the majority of whom are registered and enrolled nurses with wide ranging clinical skills and knowledge and extensive professional experience. The diversity offered by this specialty and the developments in models of care for older people mean that Aged Care also offers nurses new and interesting clinical practice challenges and excellent career prospects.

Employment opportunities for registered and enrolled nurses in our facilities are also very good. Positions are advertised in the Thursday edition of the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper and on the NSW Health website www.health.nsw.gov.au/jobs.

Garrawarra Centre at Waterfall runs a 12-month Assistant in Nursing Program which prepares people to work in the Aged Care field and provides a good foundation for the pursuit of further nursing studies leading to the enrolled nurse or registered nurse qualifications. Applications for the program are advertised in the Illawarra Mercury and St George & Sutherland Shire Leader newspapers.

Nursing research is actively encouraged in SESIH with support and advice available from the Professor of Aged and Extended Care Nursing and her team in the Health and Ageing Research Unit at War Memorial Hospital.

Education and Scholarships

Whatever the field of practice, further education for nurses is an essential part of being a health professional in the 21st century. Numerous courses, many of which are suitable for nurses working in Aged Care, are currently available at all levels of study, from certificate to masters or doctoral degrees. Education is delivered in hospitals, by professional organisations, at TAFE and in universities and more information can be found by visiting the relevant websites.

Scholarships, funded by the Department of Health and Ageing are available for the study of Aged Care Nursing at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels through the Royal College of Nursing, Australia.

Further information can be found on their website: www.rcna.org.au/site/agedscholar1.php.

Information on scholarships offered by other industry, professional and educational bodies can be found on the NSW Health website: www.health.nsw.gov.au/nursing/scholar.html

Consider the many benefits and opportunities that a career in Aged Care in SESIH offers and visit our website for more information.