**Headline:**

“How can operational leaders help nurses keep older people functioning during a hospital stay?”

# What this research is about

Almost one half of older people admitted to hospital experience functional decline, which is loss in the ability to independently perform basic activities of daily life such as walking or dressing. Hospital leaders (e.g. unit managers, directors, administrators) are responsible for cultivating practice environments and can potentially support nurses in preventing functional decline in older people. Yet, very little attention has been paid to how leaders can help nurses keep older people functioning. This study explored nurses’ perspectives on what they need from their leaders to keep older people functioning when they are in hospital.

**What the researchers did**

Thirteen focus group discussions were held with 57 nurses working in 18 acute care hospitals from across Ontario. Nurses were asked to discuss their perspectives on how leaders can support them in providing care that aims to preserve and restore older people’s functioning. The researchers analyzed the discussions using thematic analysis.

# What the researchers found

Nurses discussed leadership at several levels. Their recommendations were mainly specific to managers, but were also directed towards leaders more generally, including ‘CEOs’, ‘administrators’, ‘supervisors’, and ‘department heads’. Nurses saw that leaders are under great pressure to improve efficiency of the healthcare system but too out of touch with older people’s care to design age friendly system efficiency initiatives. Consequently, leaders’ efforts to improve efficiency can sometimes have unintended negative consequences that undermine older people’s functioning and nurses’ ability to support their functioning. Nurses indicated that they need more opportunities to help leaders appreciate older people’s functional vulnerabilities and recommended that leaders come to the units and solicit nurses’ input into designing age friendly system efficiency initiatives. Nurses also identified four key ways that leaders can support nurses in optimizing older people’s functioning. First, leaders should facilitate the accessibility of healthcare providers, such as physiotherapists, by reorganizing their work hours so they are available to support older people’s functioning during evenings and weekends. Second, leaders should ensure that nurses are included in meetings where interprofessional teams make important decisions that impact nurses’ care with older people. Third, leaders should take charge duringfamily-nurse conflicts to prevent them from interfering with nurses’ provision of care aimed at improving functioning. Fourth, leaders should ensure that nurses have help to perform the physical parts of care, such as ambulating patients out of bed, and equipment, such as electronic lifts.

# How you can use this research

Leaders at all levels should consider how their efforts to improve efficiency may undermine nurses’ ability to support older people’s functioning, and should **make older people’s functioning a higher priority when formulating and implementing hospital and unit policies aimed at improving system efficiency.** Leaders should become more connected to practice to better appreciate the functional vulnerabilities of older people and the challenges that nurses face in trying to prevent functional decline in older people. Administrators and policy- makers should set measurable targets f**or older people’s functional outcomes and provide** incentives to encourage managers, directors, and supervisors to meet these targets Managers can use the findings to provide nurses with the supports needed to optimize older people’s functioning while in hospital.

# About the Researchers

Mary Fox is Associate Professor and Jeffrey Butler is Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Nursing and Centre for Aging Research and Education (YU-CARE) at York University.

# Keywords

*Keywords: ­*acute care, healthcare system efficiency, operational leaders, older people, functional ability

# Citation

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