Today, more than 10 million people in the United States require some form of long-term care, a number that is rapidly increasing and will continue to do so for years to come. This concise and user-friendly resource contains the fundamental information long-term care nurses need to provide all aspects of safe and effective care to their patients in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Written by a renowned and highly respected nurse leader in long-term care and gerontology, it presents key facts and core competencies related to the clinical and managerial responsibilities of nurses in these settings. Details on the specific skills required for this challenging specialty, as well as must-know information on regulatory standards, site visits, management and leadership, and dementia care, are presented in a concise format for quick access to information.

The book embodies a holistic approach to nursing that recognizes the importance of quality of life in addition to quality of care. It provides an overview of the unique features of long-term care, addressing the operational differences between these settings and those of acute settings, the distinct responsibilities of long-term care nurses, special needs of the residents, and major clinical challenges. The text offers guidance on the use of evidence-based knowledge within the constraints of long-term care settings. Topics such as legal risks, documentation essentials, and the importance of self-care are covered, along with management and leadership issues relevant to the supervision of unlicensed personnel.

Fast Facts in a Nutshell feature assists readers in reinforcing and applying content, and a comprehensive resource list supplements the text. The book will also serve as a useful study tool for long-term nursing care certification.

Key Features:
- Embodies the essential competencies for long-term care nursing practice
- Presents information in a concise easy-to-access format with bulleted facts and the Fast Facts in a Nutshell feature
- Addresses management and leadership issues germane to the long-term care setting
- Includes must-know information on regulatory standards, site visits, legal risks, documentation essentials, and more
- Guides nurses in using evidence-based knowledge in long-term care settings

Charlotte Eliopoulos

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FAST FACTS FOR
THE LONG-TERM CARE NURSE
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FAST FACTS FOR THE LONG-TERM CARE NURSE

What Nursing Home and Assisted Living Nurses Need to Know in a Nutshell

Charlotte Eliopoulos, PhD, MPH, RN

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Preface

Long-term care consists of a continuum of services and supports that assist people with health and living needs over an extended period of time. Today more than 10 million people require some form of long-term care and the aging of the baby boomer population, coupled with increased longevity, will heighten the demand for this form of care for decades to come. Growing numbers of nurses will be working in long-term care and playing a major role in the provision of long-term care services.

Individuals who are living with chronic conditions and disabilities require ongoing monitoring, assessment, and care that fall within the scope of nursing practice. Further, nurses are ideally suited to address holistic needs that promote the highest possible quality of life for these individuals. Due to the wide range of conditions that people in need of long-term care possess, the diversity of this population, and the reality that long-term care nurses often work without close proximity to medical providers, nurses working in this specialty must be highly clinically competent. In addition, nurses working in long-term care often must delegate to and supervise other staff, requiring that they also demonstrate managerial competencies. When the realities of long-term care nursing are considered, it is one of the most challenging specialties for nurses. It also can be one of the most rewarding specialties in that nurses establish long-term relationships with the people they serve, which enables them to have a greater impact on their lives and well-being.

This book provides an overview of the unique aspects of long-term care with a specific focus on nurses working in nursing home and assisted living settings. It offers a review of the unique aspects and settings for long-term care, special needs of the population served, and clinical challenges. As a significant number of individuals who need long-term care services have cognitive impairment, a section is
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devoted to the care of residents with dementias. Management skills,
legal risks, and issues pertaining to surveys are presented. In recogni-
tion of the stresses that can arise in long-term care nursing, a chapter
is dedicated to the important topic of self-care.

The book is intended to serve as a quick reference for the wide
range of clinical and managerial issues that a long-term care nurse
may face. Boxes and tables are provided for quick reference, and the
feature “Fast Facts in a Nutshell” highlights special points. Resources
for exploring additional information are listed at the end of the book.
The range of topics covered in this text will contribute to enhancing
the competencies of nurses working in this specialty and promoting
a greater appreciation of the complexities of long-term care nursing.

Charlotte Eliopoulos
PART

The Basics of Long-Term Care
Unique Aspects of Long-Term Care

Long-term care consists of services to assist persons with chronic conditions or disabilities who are unable to meet routine self-care activities and the demands of health conditions. As the name implies, care is needed over an extended period of time. Long-term care can be provided in individuals’ private homes by home health agencies and informal caregivers or in residential facilities such as nursing homes and assisted living communities. With increasing life expectancies and more people living to ages at which the need for caregiving assistance heightens, reduced birth rates that decrease the potential caregivers available to older individuals, and improved medical care that enables people to live longer with complex conditions, the need for long-term care will continue to grow. Accompanying this will be the need for more nurses prepared in the unique aspects of this type of care.

This chapter should enable you to:

1. Compare and contrast acute and long-term care
2. Describe characteristics of a holistic approach to care
3. List characteristics of a therapeutic environment
4. Describe components of basic, holistic, and healing needs
5. List characteristics of assisted living and nursing home residents
6. Describe characteristics of long-term care nursing
4

1. UNIQUE ASPECTS OF LONG-TERM CARE

Nursing students and other health professionals receive most of their clinical experience in acute care settings. It is understandable, therefore, that they may lack an understanding of the unique aspects of long-term care.

In many acute care situations the focus is on diagnosing and treating health conditions. Patients can be treated without the nursing staff knowing their family relationships, living arrangements, scheduling preferences, spiritual practices, interests, personal desires, and occupational history. Consistent with the short duration of the encounter, the focus is on diagnosing and treating the condition.

The situation is quite different in long-term care settings. Owing to the extended time that most individuals reside in a nursing home or assisted living community, be it on a temporary or permanent basis, this setting will become a home for them. For this reason, quality of life joins quality of care as an important focus of services; a holistic approach supports this focus. Table 1.1 contrasts some of the characteristics of acute and long-term care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1.1 Similarities and Differences Between Acute and Long-Term Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Care provided</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment of urgent/emergency conditions, injuries, and acute illness; diagnostic workup for new conditions, surgeries, and related care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nurses’ role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
**TABLE 1.1 Similarities and Differences Between Acute and Long-Term Care (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Acute Care</th>
<th>Long-Term Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time frame</strong></td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Weeks to permanent stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staffing</strong></td>
<td>Primarily professional staff</td>
<td>Primarily unlicensed caregivers under supervision of licensed nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong></td>
<td>Supports interventions, technical</td>
<td>Supports caregiving needs and provision of homelike environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holism is a theoretical approach that views the whole as being greater than its parts. In the context of health care, this means that in order to care for the whole person, the various parts of the person—physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual—must be addressed. When they are, the resulting synergy creates an outcome more powerful than would be achieved by attention only to a part. A holistic approach:

- Recognizes that a person is a complex combination of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social components that interact to influence total health and well-being
- Strives to achieve a balance of body, mind, and spirit rather than merely focusing on removing or managing the signs and symptoms of disease
- Fosters empowerment of the individual to actively participate in and, to the degree realistically possible, direct care

**Clinical Snapshot**

Two men have similar cardiovascular conditions. One receives expert medical attention, including medications, instruction in an exercise program and dietary modifications, and regular monitoring. The other receives similar medical attention, but also is afforded opportunities to discuss the impact of the diagnosis on family roles and responsibilities, his desire to strengthen his relationship with God, and his concern about his ability to engage in sexual activity.

The first man complies with the medical regimen and has normal diagnostic tests, yet carries emotional burdens that have a negative impact on his quality of life, produce stress, and threaten his motivation for ongoing compliance. The second man is able to discuss and work through issues that strengthen his motivation to adhere to the treatment plan and carve out a meaningful life.

The holistic approach used in the care of the second man enables him to live in harmony with his cardiovascular condition, potentially resulting in improved health outcomes and a higher quality of life.
61. UNIQUE ASPECTS OF LONG-TERM CARE

There are additional considerations when care is provided in nursing homes and assisted living communities in that for many residents, these facilities will become their home. For this reason, attention must be given to the human and material factors that create a therapeutic environment promoting a sense of “home.”

A therapeutic environment promotes holistic health, function, and healing. Characteristics of a long-term care facility that support a therapeutic environment are that it:

- Meets regulatory standards
- Is clean, safe, and free from odors and clutter
- Supports ease of use for persons with various mental and physical disabilities
- Provides space and opportunities for privacy, socialization, and solitude
- Offers sensory stimulation
- Incorporates nature (e.g., pets, plants)
- Is visually appealing
- Uses scents, sounds, and lighting therapeutically
- Affords residents the opportunity to personalize their rooms
- Is comfortable and inviting to visitors
- Facilitates easy interaction with the local community

The culture change movement has brought about considerable transformation in nursing homes that have contributed to creating a higher quality of life and more homelike environment. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

Part of what constitutes home for many individuals is the relationship with family and significant others. Typically, a home is welcoming to these individuals and provides a nucleus for socialization. By contrast, a long-term care facility is a new and unusual environment for most people. Privacy is often limited, and exposure to certain sights, sounds, and odors can make both residents and visitors uncomfortable. To address holistic needs and promote continuity of relationships, nursing staff must act to foster visitation and continued meaningful relationships among residents and their loved ones.

In addition to making the nursing home or assisted living community welcoming and comfortable to family members, nurses also must consider the needs of the family. Family members may face challenges when their relative is admitted to a nursing home or assisted living facility, such as financial burdens, decisions about selling a home and relocating, and depression and anxiety at losing the companion or adjusting to the changed status of their relative. Nurses need to explore these issues with family members and provide guidance and assistance to them as necessary. (Chapter 13 offers a full discussion of caring for families.)

When examining the many facets of long-term care and its unique features compared with acute care, nurses can envision that their activities will involve:
71. UNIQUE ASPECTS OF LONG-TERM CARE

• Ensuring that basic and therapeutic needs are met
• Promoting holistic care for health and harmony of the body, mind, and spirit
• Supporting healing by helping the person achieve optimal physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being and function

**FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL**

Healing is not limited to curing. Individuals with chronic conditions and disabilities can achieve healing by establishing a meaningful, satisfying life with their conditions and reaching their optimal level of physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual function.

Although having basic needs met, medications administered, and treatments performed are important and necessary to people with long-term care needs, these activities do not necessarily assure a satisfying, fulfilling life. Long-term care nursing interventions exceed these basic activities to support holistic care and quality of life (Figure 1.1).

THE LONG-TERM CARE POPULATION

Most of the long-term care population is of advanced age. Although at any given time less than 5% of older adults are in a nursing home or assisted living community, approximately one fourth of this population will spend some time in these facilities during their lifetimes. Assisted living and nursing home residents tend to be non-Hispanic white females in their early 80s or older who have at least one chronic condition, demonstrate limitations in meeting at least two activities of daily living, and need assistance with managing their medications. More than half suffer from dementia. Other common diagnoses are hypertension, heart disease, depression, arthritis, osteoporosis, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cancer, and stroke.

**FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL**

Currently there are more than 15,000 nursing homes with 1.7 million beds and twice that number of assisted living communities serving nearly one million individuals.
1. UNIQUE ASPECTS OF LONG-TERM CARE

HEALING NEEDS

Achievement of peak potential of physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual functioning or peaceful dying process, or both

Spiritual awareness and growth

Self-discovery through use of illness as an opportunity to seek growth and purpose

Establishment of meaningful, purposeful life

HOLISTIC NEEDS

Attainment of harmony of mind, body, and spirit

Prevention of avoidable decline and dysfunction

Maximum possible responsibility for self-care

Exercise of individual rights and decision-making capacity

Interconnection with community within and outside facility

BASIC NEEDS

Satisfaction of physiological needs

Restoration or stabilization of physical and mental health, or both

Assurance of safety of human and physical environment

Treatment of conditions

Information for informed decision making

FIGURE 1.1 Levels of needs of long-term care residents.

LONG-TERM CARE NURSING

Long-term care is provided in various settings (see Chapter 2), and although some nursing roles and responsibilities are unique to specific settings, these general nursing activities are common to all:

- Assessment: The assessment process examines the individual in a holistic manner to determine the extent to which basic, holistic, and healing needs are being met (see Figure 1.1). As a person would not be admitted to a nursing home or assisted living community...
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without the need for assistance, the deficits in the person’s ability to independently fulfill total needs must be identified, followed by a more in-depth assessment of factors contributing to the deficits.

- **Care planning:** This leads to the development of the care plans with goals to address the needs and deficits, along with related actions. Nursing actions could include one or more of the following: strengthening the person’s ability to meet needs independently, removing or minimizing factors that contribute to the person’s limitations in meeting needs, or partially or totally providing the care necessary to meet the needs. Figure 1.2 demonstrates how this process flows.

Assessment of ability to meet basic physiological needs, protect self, self-administer medications and treatments, socialize, fulfill spiritual needs, make informed decisions, express needs and preferences

Person able to fulfill needs

Nursing actions to support resident’s current level of function and regularly reassesses ongoing ability to meet needs

Person unable to fulfill needs; deficit or need identified

Reason for inability to meet need determined

Measurable goals developed

Nursing actions to address needs or deficits determined (strengthening person’s ability to meet needs independently, removing or minimizing factors that contribute to person’s limitations in meeting needs, and/or partially or totally providing care necessary to meet needs)

Ongoing monitoring and reassessment of effectiveness of goals and plans; revisions as needed

**FIGURE 1.2** The flow of nursing actions based on the assessed needs of the individual.
1. UNIQUE ASPECTS OF LONG-TERM CARE

In addition to direct clinical services, most nurses in long-term care settings must perform a variety of management functions. Typically, most direct care staff in long-term care settings are nursing assistants who have limited preparation. The supervision, coaching, and guidance of nursing assistants are performed by licensed nurses. In addition, nursing home settings are highly regulated, and nurses must ensure that these regulations are consistently adhered to.

Box 1.1 describes some of the basic nursing responsibilities in long-term care settings.

**Box 1.1 Basic Nursing Responsibilities in Long-Term Care Settings**

**Clinical**
- Assess residents
- Develop or participate in development of care plans
- Communicate resident’s care plan to caregivers
- Monitor and evaluate effectiveness of plans and actions
- Identify changes in status of resident
- Communicate changes in resident’s status to health care provider
- Administer, observe reactions to, and evaluate effectiveness of medications
- Perform treatments and direct care activities
- Coordinate diagnostic tests; communicate test results to health care provider
- Review, accept, communicate, and implement orders from health care providers
- Document as needed and according to protocols
- Assist in emergency situations
- Facilitate admission and discharge of resident
- Assist in emergency care
- Comply with infection prevention and control policies and procedures
- Ensure residents’ rights are respected
- Instruct residents and significant others as needed
- Provide emotional support
- Assist resident in fulfilling spiritual needs

**Managerial**
- Accept and give shift reports; communicate new orders and changes to staff and residents

(continued)
1. UNIQUE ASPECTS OF LONG-TERM CARE

Box 1.1  (continued)

- Develop assignments; delegate activities; supervise staff to whom activities are delegated
- Monitor needs of staff
- Intervene when violations of standards of care, policies, or procedures are detected
- Administer disciplinary actions as needed and according to organizational policies
- Identify and take actions to resolve staff, operational, or environmental problems
- Inspect environment and equipment for safety and cleanliness
- Ensure appropriate amount and condition of equipment and supplies
- Provide instruction to direct care staff as needed
- Document meetings and counseling sessions
- Participate in committees
- Communicate problems and need to administrative staff
- Promote positive customer service

FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL

Staffing in nursing homes and assisted living communities differs from that of hospitals in that most direct care providers are nursing assistants. Registered nurses constitute a small percentage of staff and often fill managerial and administrative positions. In addition, the total number of hours of nursing care provided per resident is considerably less than that in hospital settings.

Occasionally, people unfamiliar with the realities of nursing homes and assisted living communities comment that working in these settings must be dull or easier than acute care. In reality, to provide competent nursing services in long-term care settings, nurses must utilize a wide range of knowledge and skills. Consider that, on an average day, long-term care nurses may be providing care for residents with cardiovascular, pulmonary, neurological, endocrine, gastrointestinal, genitourinary, musculoskeletal, psychiatric, and cognitive disorders. They may have to administer a wide range of medications, ensure adherence to proper isolation technique, assist with dialysis, reinforce exercises prescribed by therapists, respond to a cardiac arrest, support a dying resident, and manage the behaviors
1. UNIQUE ASPECTS OF LONG-TERM CARE

To adequately fulfill their responsibilities in nursing homes and assisted living communities, nurses in these settings must be highly competent; this includes possessing:

- Evidence-based knowledge of common chronic conditions and age-appropriate care
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Expert assessment skills that address holistic needs and well-being
- Strategies to promote resident-centered and resident-directed care
- Ability to access, use, and evaluate information from a wide range of sources
- Effective written and verbal communication skills
- Ability to prioritize and plan nursing interventions
- Current management and coaching skills
- Knowledge of practices and technology that support safe practice
- Ability to manage their own time and that of others effectively
- Team leadership, collaboration, and facilitation skills
- Knowledge and use of codes of ethics affecting practice
- Ability to use information technology
- Analytical skills to utilize data
- Interest and actions that support quality improvement
- Knowledge of current regulations, laws, policies, and procedures that affect their practice
- Awareness and sensitivity to the needs and issues of people with diverse cultural, racial, spiritual, and sexual-orientation backgrounds
- Self-initiative to keep abreast of changed and new practices
- Positive self-care behaviors, and modeling of these behaviors to others
- Accountability for their own behaviors and practice

The diversity of conditions that residents possess helps make long-term care settings a clinically challenging practice setting for nurses. Long-term care nursing also provides the opportunity to offer whole-person care and develop meaningful relationships with residents and their significant others. It can be a very satisfying and rewarding branch of nursing.