

Partners in **NURSE ADVANCEMENT**

OUR MISSION

Partnering to enhance nurse competencies and advancement in assisted living environments through education.

What brought you to AALNA?

Geriatric nursing is a small world and Hartford Institute of Geriatric Nursing (HIGN) has worked with AALNA over the years around long-term care policy issues. AALNA invited me to sit on their board because of our shared commitment for quality care for older adults and I agreed to join.

What drew you to geriatric nursing?

What really hooked me was my experience as a director of nursing at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. I was responsible for all of medicine, adult ambulatory care and the Emergency Department. Sixty percent of the patients coming into the hospital were 65 or older, so we were seeing a tremendous number of older adults. I worked closely with the chair of geriatrics to enhance quality and continuity of care, particularly during transitions from hospital to home or hospital to nursing home. I learned that the complexity of caring for older adults is very challenging and so different from caring for other adults. I saw there were many opportunities for innovation in care delivery.

How important is it for assisted living nurses to have a professional network?

It's very important because long-term care is often isolated from mainstream healthcare. Healthcare is a continuum of health promotion and disease management. Nurses, regardless of where they work, should communicate with each other, support each other, and understand their role in helping people to live to their potential as they age. Assisted living nurses need a support system that gives them a place to come together where the excellence and standards of their practice are supported and promoted.

How is the AALNA board helping assisted living nurses further their careers?

The entire board is cognizant of the educational needs of nurses working in assisted living and we're always looking at ways to provide the resources they need to benefit their practice. For example, there's textbook on assisted living that's being revised right now. There are online courses, developed in partnership with HIGN, that AALNA is promoting. We make sure nurses have opportunities to keep their practice relevant and up to date, and to ensure they are using evidence-based practice all the time.

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– **Tara Cortes, PhD, RN**

Executive Director, Hartford
 Institute of Geriatric Nursing
 Professor at NYU Meyers College
 of Nursing
 Member, AALNA Board of Directors

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How has the practice of nursing in assisted living changed?

It's important to remember that assisted living today is not like it was 20 years ago, and it's only going to become more complex as our population ages. Assisted living is a perfect situation for so many people because they have the support they need, but still have the feeling of a home environment and can experience independent living to whatever extent they can. But people living in assisted living are more complicated and more compromised in their activities of daily living than they used to be. As our population of people over 65 years of age and over 85 years of age continues to grow, we see more people living with chronic disease and dementia.

Nationally, there is a focus on the four Ms as the framework for caring for older adults across all settings, including assisted living. The first M is "what matters." What's important to an individual? This is person-centered care. The next M is medications, which means making sure an individual is on the right medications and not over-medicated. The third is mobility; being sure the person can be safely mobile. The fourth one is mentation, and that means recognizing the signs and symptoms dementia, delirium, and depression, which can indicate a serious medical condition. If nurses are providing care that includes assessment and intervention on the four Ms, they're providing good care.

Why should new nurses consider assisted living?

Assisted living gives nurses the opportunity to provide complex care and engage with older people who bring with them the joys, sorrows, and wisdom of many years of living. Nurses in assisted living practice very independently and work in an environment where they can gain leadership experience. They can also provide health promotion, disease prevention, and chronic disease management to an extent that is not always possible in other nursing fields.

A lot of young nurses think they want to be in the emergency room or in the ICU because that's where "you save lives." But in those settings, there are protocols for everything. When you're caring for older adults, there's no protocol because no two people are alike. They're all different and they bring different life experiences to the table. It's a fascinating population to care for.

What's keeping assisted living nurses up at night?

Staffing. Staffing is a nationwide problem that's more acute in long-term care.

How can AALNA and PharMerica help address this concern?

By elevating and promoting the idea of working in assisted living and caring for older people. We need to be aware of ageism and make sure that the information and resources we provide are free of age bias. Ageism is what prevents a lot of young nurses from pursuing a career in assisted living or long-term care. All of us need to work together to decrease the fear of aging and promote more intergenerational empathy and understanding.

To learn more about how PharMerica is supporting DONs, other nurse leaders, and nursing staff in assisted living, visit PharMerica.com/partners-in-nurse-advancement.