

Health Disciplines Involved in Working With Older People

Brief Role Descriptions

Dietician

The primary aim of clinical dietetic management is to promote normal nutritional status, thereby optimising functional status, reducing medical complication rates and minimising the need for tertiary health care. The role of the dietician is to assess a client's nutrition-related needs, implement a nutrition care plan, and provide regular monitoring of dietetic intervention.

Podiatrist

Podiatrists are involved in care planning, clinical interventions and education for patients with issues relating to the status of their feet. Foot health can impact on the overall health status of a client in terms of mobility, comfort, the ability to participate in weight-bearing exercise and activities, and the likelihood of new complications arising from underlying conditions.

Psychologist

Psychologists assess, monitor, treat and assist in the management of a range of cognitive, behavioural and adjustment difficulties. Psychological interventions may be offered to individual patients, patient groups or family groups. Clinical psychologists specialise in the diagnosis and treatment of serious psychological difficulties, with the aim of helping patients, carers and healthcare teams to address the problems effectively and adaptively. Clinical neuropsychologists provide specialist assessment and intervention for patients with known or suspected neurological disorders or acquired brain injury.

Nurse

Nurses are involved in prevention, care planning, coordination, clinical interventions and education in relation to patients' overall healthcare needs. Nurses participate in the administration of medication (as prescribed by a medical practitioner), as well as the monitoring and reporting of medication effects and side effects. Nurses are involved in the monitoring of general health status, treatment and care of wounds, and interventions in relation to fluid balance, continence, and a range of other health issues, depending on the specific healthcare setting.

Optometrist

Optometrists are involved in the assessment and treatment of visual difficulties. They are trained to examine eyes, screen for common eye problems, and prescribe eye exercises or corrective lenses.

Medical Practitioner

Generally, the medical practitioner is often the case-coordinator or team leader. Depending upon the setting, the medical practitioner may be a General Practitioner, Registrar, or specialist. The medical practitioner is responsible predominantly for diagnosis of clinical conditions, prescribing medication, and interpreting test results.

Occupational Therapist

Occupational therapists work to promote health and wellbeing, independence and productivity. OT is indicated where the person's health condition, possibly in association with physical, social or environmental barriers limit ability to carry out activities of everyday life and/or restricts ability to participate in social, vocational or recreational activities.

Diversional Therapist

Diversional therapists are involved in designing and implementing activities for older people in the community and residential care settings. These activities are designed to be stimulating, interesting, enjoyable, and purposeful. Activities are sometimes designed for specific groups or individuals, where there are particular needs or interests.

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapists are associated with assessing, diagnosing and treating disorders of human movement, with special emphasis on the neurological, musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems. Physiotherapy programs are based on functional goals designed to facilitate the patient's physical recovery, minimise length of hospital stays, and maximise the patient's ability to reach optimal levels of function and independence.

Exercise Physiologist

Exercise physiologists assess client's exercise needs and design programs to facilitate their ability to reach optimal levels of function and independence, and reduce complications arising from inadequate or inappropriate movement and exercise. They also provide education about exercise and movement.

Social Worker

Social workers conduct psychosocial assessments, counselling, crisis intervention, liaison, referral, resourcing, advocacy, and provide information and education. They work to maximise psychosocial functioning and access to required support services.

Speech Pathologist

Speech pathologists conduct education, interventions and support with patients who have difficulties with swallowing and feeding, communication, respiratory function, and complex neurological deficits.

Pharmacist

Pharmacists are experts in the area of medication management. They provide education and information about drugs and other preparations, and provide the medications that are prescribed by medical practitioners, as well as a range of over-the-counter preparations. They are able to advise regarding the safe administration, storage, and dosage and of medications.

Prosthetist/Orthotist

The prosthetist/orthotist is predominantly involved with service provision to those clients with musculoskeletal issues. They provide education about the donning, doffing, effective use, wearing regimes, care and maintenance of the orthosis /prosthesis to clients, families and staff.