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Leading Change. Improving Care for Older Adults.

AGS Section

We need all health providers proficient in geriatrics-informed care; a new online curriculum aims to bring us closer

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Among the many breakthroughs that have made increased longevity possible, better health care—and more expert nurses, pharmacists, physicians, physician assistants, social workers, and other geriatrics professionals to make that care possible—loom large. Given that all of us (and indeed, more people than ever before) are aging, however, we still need even more clinicians, researchers, and advocates to keep that momentum going. At present, for example, fewer than 1% of registered nurses and fewer than 3% of advanced practice registered nurses are certified in geriatrics, despite the fact that older patients can account for more than a quarter of all physician office visits and more than a third of all hospital stays.¹

With a limited number of geriatrics experts practicing in our communities, how are we to train the next generation of clinicians to care for older people? A new tool from the American Geriatrics Society (AGS) and Aquifer (a non-profit leader in developing clinical learning tools for health professions education) holds promise for bridging that gap. Aquifer Geriatrics (available at Aquifer.org/Courses/Aquifer-Geriatrics/), the AGS's national online curriculum in geriatrics, is leveraging e-learning and geriatrics' thought-leadership to advance much needed training to care for older adults.

The idea behind Aquifer Geriatrics is simple: Learners at subscribing institutions have instantaneous access to each of 26 evidence-based, peer-reviewed cases addressing the fundamentals of caring for older adults.² The Aquifer Geriatrics curriculum was developed by experts from the AGS and Association of Directors of Geriatric Academic Programs (ADGAP) using the framework of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)/John A. Hartford Foundation Minimum Geriatrics Competencies for Graduating Medical Students.² Cases meet the needs of today's learner as they can be completed at a subscriber's own pace, without the need for a traditional "classroom."² Subscriptions

ensure that the course will be sustainable, providing consistent funding for content updates from a dedicated board of top educators.^{2,3}

Importantly, each of the 26 cases delivers knowledge and skills but also models a geriatrics health professional's approach to care. As explained by Mandi Sehgal, MD, Associate Professor of Geriatric Medicine at Florida Atlantic University Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine and one of the team members responsible for Aquifer Geriatrics: "Rather than focusing on the myth of 'one right answer,' each of the cases teaches clinical reasoning and reflects the nuances of what it takes to do what geriatrics does best: Deliver high-quality, person-centered care with a focus on function and quality of life"⁴ (para 2).

The online curriculum's approach is innovative—but why is it needed? For several reasons, though principal among them the reality that almost every health professional in the U.S. will care for older patients at some point in their training or careers.^{2,3} Despite the growth of the older adult patient population, however, education addressing what makes care for older people unique still varies in duration and even content, often due to the limited number of geriatrics educators available at our health professions schools.² Developed initially with funding from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, the cases that make up Aquifer Geriatrics provide up-to-date, evidence-based content in geriatrics education.² They teach healthcare professionals principles of caring for older adults appropriately, and they make it easy to do so even if a geriatrics clinician-educator is not immediately available to teach some of the basics.^{2,3}

An article published earlier this year in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (JAGS)* introduces the Aquifer Geriatrics curriculum and walks through several of its early successes, as well as strategies to help clinicians and institutions adopt the platform.² In a related editorial also published in *JAGS*, independent educational experts noted that the program holds promise for "helping to fill the gap that is left by the

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shortage of geriatrics educators” in preparing the field to “play the long game,” thanks to innovative solutions to education³ (p. 647).

Aquifer Geriatrics cases can be completed on smartphones, tablets, or computers, and can be used independently or by schools with curricular time available to students.² For more information or to learn about subscription options, visit [Aquifer.org/Courses/Aquifer-Geriatrics/](https://www.aquifer.org/Courses/Aquifer-Geriatrics/).

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