

Title.

A Look at Local Geriatric Competencies

Abstract.

By the year 2030, 61 million baby boomers will be between the ages of 66 and 84. When that number is added to the 9 million "oldest old," those born before 1946, there will be 70 million individuals who will need access to aging related services (Knickman & Snell, 2002). Studies consistently find that currently there are too few social workers in the geriatric field, and that many of those workers lack professional geriatric training and may not be adequately prepared to help aging clients. However, these studies focus on national estimates of need and availability of trained workers and have, for the most part, not included information gleaned from a local aging services provider. Administering the Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale to employees and interviewing key staff members of OCES will provide data regarding how frontline workers perceive their geriatric competency compared to supervisor expectations. Other anticipated outcomes include a succinct summary of how the agency prepares incoming workers to best address the needs of their clients, what resources the agency has, or may have need of, as well as how their resource lists are updated.

Research Questions.

1. How do current frontline workers of a typical regional aging services access point agency (ASAP) assess their geriatric competency?
2. How are ASAP's new hires prepared for competence in aging issues, and in accessing local resources?
3. Are there gaps between resources offered by the agency and client needs, as perceived by frontline and management employees?
4. How does a large regional aging services agency provide on-going training to staff and update resources?

Introduction.

While there are advances being made, the social work field at large is not yet prepared for the tremendous influx of baby boomers who increasingly need access to aging-related services, programs, and benefits (Sisco, Volland, & Gorin, 2005). Of particular concern is the availability of competent personnel who will be working to provide and coordinate the care of this older population. Workers who lack professional geriatric training may not be prepared to help clients resolve ethical questions, may overlook crucial information which introduces the risk that a client's needs will not be effectively addressed, or they may not be equipped to deal with service delivery organizations that may be perceived as daunting to clients (Scharlach, Simon, & DalSanto, 2002; Scharlach, et al., 2000). In spite of the strong consensus among researchers that too few social workers have been adequately trained for competency in work with the aged, there was a need to determine what competency in gerontological training looked like (Naito-Chan, Damron-Rodriguez, & Simmons, 2004; Rosen, Zlotnik, Singer, 2002; Damron-Rodriguez et al. 2006). This need was recently addressed when The John A. Hartford Foundation funded a

project undertaken by the Council on Social Work Education resulting in a 40 item instrument known as the Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale.

This self-assessment scale, which has become the cornerstone of determining competence in aging training, measures skills that are “recognized by gerontological social workers as important to social workers effectively working with and on behalf of older adults and their families” (Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale.(n.d.); Hooyman & Tompkins, 2005). The Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale has been used to develop educational resources that help students to attain competency for working with the aging and their families, and in at least one case, has served as foundational in the implementation of agency-based training for the social workers practicing at a Massachusetts Aging Service Access Point (ASAP)(Mills-Dick, Geron, Erwin, 2007).

This project proposes using this measure at the ASAP serving Southeastern Massachusetts, Old Colony Elderly Services (OCES). It will provide a clear picture of staff geriatric competency in their ongoing effort to provide excellent care and referrals to the elders they serve. A second significant piece of this research project will be the result of key informant interviews conducted with the OCES program managers. These interviews will focus on training issues and assessment of gaps in resources for clients. Qualitative findings will generate an overview of available resources for training and service provision, information about procedures to update resource lists and develop new resources and services, and in particular, will focus on supervisor assumptions about the geriatric competency of frontline staff.

Research in aging and social work consistently finds that workers end up in geriatric settings without adequate aging training. The results of this research will give Old Colony Elderly Services valuable information about workers’ self-assessed competence and help identify training gaps. Key informant interviews will add important information to the small body of literature that is growing up around application of the Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale. A succinct summary of how the agency prepares incoming workers to best address the needs of their clients will be another expected outcome. Findings from this agency-based research have implications for training and service delivery in the 29 Massachusetts ASAPs.

Methodology.

This research will use a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative data collection.

Quantitative data collection and analysis:

Quantitative data will be collected from home care case managers and division managers via a written survey instrument built on the Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale (GSWCS). The four sections of the GSWCS (included in Appendix) will be supplemented with basic demographic questions and items that seek respondent assessment of gaps in available services for clients. Each respondent will be provided a cover letter, informed consent form, written survey, and two self addressed, stamped envelopes. To insure anonymity of the participants, the informed consent forms will be returned separately from the surveys. The data will be analyzed using SPSS.

Qualitative data collection and analysis:

The key informant interviews will be conducted individually with the director of the agency, assistant director, the director of information and referrals and program managers. An interview guide consisting of 8-10 open-ended questions will be used. The interviews will be taped, transcribed and the content categorized and analyzed.

Works Cited

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Logistics.

This research will be conducted at Old Colony Elderly Services, who has expressed an interest in the research and the results. The organization is located at 144 Main Street, Brockton, MA. It will be necessary to purchase a tape recorder to complete the key informant interviews. Travel to and from the research site will be via personal vehicle. There are few other needs except for purchasing stamps and making copies. Professor Alcon and I will be in contact every week either by email or face to face. During the last half of the project we will meet at least weekly. The findings will be presented to the management group at OCES.

Timeline:

Refine instrument	May 29 – June 5
Refine interview guide	
Distribute instrument and guide for feedback	
Schedule interviews	
Formalize data collection plans	
Continue to schedule interviews	June 8 - June 12
Make final revisions to instrument	
Make final revisions to interview guide	
Meet with OCES Director	
Copy instruments	June 15 – June 19
Distribute instruments	
Conduct interviews	
Conduct interviews	June 22 – June 26
Distribute instruments	
Begin data collection	June 29 – July 3
Finish conducting interviews	
Develop data file	
Data collection	July 6 – July 10
Begin interview transcription	
Enter data	
Continue data collection	July 13 – July 17
Continue interview transcription	
Continue to enter data	
Continue interview transcription	July 20 – July 24
Continue to enter data	
Continue interview transcription	July 27 – July 31
Continue to enter data	
Analyze quantitative data	
Conclude interview transcription	August 3 – August 6
Analyze qualitative data	