



## Letter to the Editor

Geriatric Nurses in Mainland China Play Crucial Roles in Providing Dementia Care<sup>☆</sup>

## To the Editor

The world prevalence of dementia will reach 65.7 million in 2030<sup>1</sup>. The situation is even more alarming in China given its huge elderly population and insufficient care provision.

In addition to pharmacological treatment, cognitive and psychosocial interventions have become core modalities for elders with dementia<sup>2</sup>. In Hong Kong, nurses are well trained through continuous professional development to implement the services. In mainland China, the conditions are far less favorable. While the nurses are considered to undertake the posts in developing and delivering dementia care, they are not properly and adequately equipped. The financial resources are scarce too. Only recently seed funding has been provided in Wuxi (China) which supports a major mental health center to launch pilot cognitive and psychosocial interventions (the 1<sup>st</sup> of its kind) by a small geriatric nursing team having briefly trained. This initiative could finally be actualized mainly because the senior management group was impressed by the positive therapeutic effects (on elders' cognition, quality of life, and wellbeing) and by the Hong Kong experts' experiences. Nonetheless, it cannot be ascertained that resources will constantly be supplied to sustain the clinical services after piloting. Evidence of the intervention effectiveness can be a sound justification. However, the standards of the pilot interventions are yet to be improved. This is in line with the findings from a cross-sectional study that the lack of competent nursing staff in mainland China severely hindered the access of elders with dementia to effective care interventions<sup>3</sup>. The intensive experiences of the practitioners and researchers in Hong Kong in establishing evidence-based practices in dementia can indeed serve as a valid reference for the mainland given the continuous interdisciplinary collaborations with the gerontological nursing profession and the comparable socio-cultural contexts. A systematic review of randomized controlled trials indicated that dementia training for nurses contributed significantly to the optimization of the outcomes of dementia care<sup>4</sup>. This gives a strong justification on scoping and supporting nurses' engagement in dementia care to ensure that they can competently take their roles and responsibilities to provide direct care to the

elders as well as education to the caregivers. Further efforts thus have to be made to explore the feasibility of enabling more substantial and sustainable guidance from the Hong Kong experts, such as validating clinical protocols, providing some direct clinical services to the elders (as demonstration), and organizing training workshops and supervision for the frontline nurse practitioners and the carers.

In short, geriatric nurses in China should start being guided to take up the roles of cognitive and psychosocial dementia care to prepare for the challenges facing the ever increasing prevalence of the disease.

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