

# research snapshot

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## How Operational Leaders Can Help Nurses Keep Older People Functioning in Hospital

### What is this research about?

Hospital leaders, such as unit managers, directors, or administrators, can potentially better support nurses in preventing functional decline. This study explored nurses' perspectives on what they need from their leaders to keep older people functioning when they are in hospital.

### What did the researchers do?

Thirteen focus group discussions were held with 57 nurses from 18 acute care hospitals across Ontario. Nurses discussed their perspectives on how leaders can support them in providing care aimed at preserving and restoring older people's functioning. The researchers used qualitative thematic analysis to analyze the discussions.

### What did the researchers find?

Three main themes were found: an emphasis on moving older people quickly through the system rather than supporting their functioning; leaders' disconnection from the realities of caring for older people; and a need for leadership strategies to support function-focused care within the context of system efficiency. Leaders' effort to improve

### What you need to know:

Nearly half of older people admitted to hospital experience functional decline, which is loss in the ability to independently perform basic activities of daily life such as walking or dressing. This study looked at ways that hospital leaders can support nurses in preventing functional decline. Key issues include leaders' emphasis on efficiency, which undermines nurses' efforts to promote older people's functioning in hospital.

efficiency can sometimes have unintended negative consequences undermining older people's functioning. Nurses want leaders to have more first-hand experience of the vulnerabilities faced by older people. They also want leaders to increase the accessibility of other healthcare providers such as physiotherapists by reorganizing work hours to more efficiently meet the functional needs of older people. Nurses also want leaders to involve them in departmental decisions that impact care.

## How can you use this research?

Leaders at all levels should consider how their efforts to improve efficiency may undermine nurses' ability to support older people's functioning, and should make older patient's functioning a higher priority when creating policies. Leaders should also become more connected to practice to better understand the difficulties faced by nurses trying to prevent functional decline. Administrators should set measurable targets for functional outcomes and provide incentives to encourage managers to meet those targets.

## About the Researchers

Mary Fox is Associate Professor and Jeffrey Butler is Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Nursing at York University. Both are members of the York University Centre for Aging Research and Education (YU-CARE).

## Citation

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## Keywords

Acute care, Healthcare system efficiency, Operational leaders, Older people, Functional ability

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[kmbunit@yorku.ca](mailto:kmbunit@yorku.ca)

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