SUBJECT: AGE SPECIFIC NURSING CARE

1. PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines for appropriate, age specific, evidenced-based nursing care for the individual population of Coalinga State Hospital.

2. POLICY:

Nursing staff shall provide the highest possible standard of care utilizing the nursing process and the most currently available evidence-based nursing practice guidelines. Nursing care shall also be based on the “Age Specific” stages of development for each Individual.

3. GENERAL INFORMATION:

The following “Age Specific” stages of development may be useful in planning care for individuals. The nurse should keep in mind that all individuals may vary in progressing through the stages of growth and development; therefore the identified ages should not be considered absolute categories.

This facility does not accept individuals under the age of 18, therefore the following age specific stages of development begin with “Early Adulthood,” at age 18.

4. STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT:

Early Adulthood Characteristics (18-29 Years of Age):

The period of early adulthood, also referred to as the “settling down” period, is influenced more by social and cultural expectations than by physical development. As a person makes the transition from adolescent to adult, he is expected to achieve independence from the parent’s home and care. During this time, the individual chooses a vocation, receives appropriate education, establishes a residence, and formulates ideas about selection of a mate or someone with whom to have a close relationship. These accomplishments provide personal satisfaction, economic security, and a feeling of contributing to the welfare of society. The early adult also establishes a personal set of
values, attitudes, and interests, and formulates his own meaningful philosophy of life. Needless to say, this can be a time of emotional stress and conflict.

Physical characteristics:

1. Brain cell development peaks during the early stages of adulthood, which increases understanding and problem solving abilities of the early adult.
2. Very few physical changes occur during this stage of development.
3. Women see the most significant physical changes during pregnancy and lactation.
4. The average adult maintains an active lifestyle and is generally in good physical health.

Common health problems:

1. The four major causes of death in this age group are related to violent death: motor vehicle accidents, other traumatic accidents, suicides, and homicides.
2. The early adult may experience stress and depression related to pressure of independence, college, competition in the workplace, marriage, childbearing, social expectations, or acceptance of peers.
3. Stress and/or their new found freedom may lead to experimentation with various lifestyles and may contribute to destructive behavior such as suicidal tendencies, substance abuse, eating disorders, or spousal abuse.
4. Sexually transmitted diseases including syphilis, genital herpes, gonorrhea, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) are areas of concern for the early adult.
5. Other physical health problems may include pregnancy complications, cervical or breast cancer, and orthopedic injuries.

Nursing Measures:

1. Perform at least one thorough health assessment, including screening for sexually transmitted diseases, hypertension, and cholesterol levels, during this period.
2. Provide health education to help develop healthy lifestyle habits with an emphasis on weight control, exercise, problems related to human sexuality, effects of drugs and alcohol, family planning, child care, and home management.
3. Provide counseling for smoking cessation programs.
4. Promote recreational and personal safety habits.
5. Encourage good personal hygiene.
Education:

Adult learning is influenced by the individual’s environment, educational level, personal values and perceptions, previous experiences, and attitudes. Thinking and learning patterns are centered around problem solving. Adults tend to be more cooperative in the learning process if they are aware of the benefits. They are focused on time constraints and only want to learn what is practical for them. Repetition is beneficial.

Young Adulthood Characteristics (30-44 Years of Age):

The goals of this age group are an extension of the early adult, particularly managing a household, rearing children, and developing a career.

Common health problems:

Major causes of death reflect the stresses of this period and the impact of unhealthy lifestyles adopted earlier in life. Causes of death differ in relation to sex and race.

Factors contributing to illness and death include external environmental conditions such as job stress and other occupational hazards, marital problems, and adjusting to parenting.

Nursing measures and health care needs:

Health habits are firmly entrenched by this stage of development. It is important to promote habits for good health and the prevention of chronic diseases. Specific interventions include:

- Stress management
- Utilization of resources and instructional courses in household management and parenting
- Dietary management: reduction in intake of sodium and sugar and maintenance of normal body weight
- Education on the dangers of substance abuse
- Developmental of healthy habits for smokers and overweight individuals
- Emphasize the importance of exercise

Education:

Education techniques are similar to the early adult.
Middle Adulthood Characteristics (45-65 Years of Age):

An increasing number of Americans are considered middle-aged. This period is a time of relatively good physical and mental health and new personal freedom. They help growing or grown children become responsible adults and free themselves from the emotional independence of their children.

The middle-age adult has the ability to make decisions in the workplace, hold high status jobs, and earn a maximum income. They begin accepting a role reversal with aging parents and preparing emotionally for the declining health of living parents. During this time, a person begins to prepare for retirement and must deal with the physical changes that occur as part of the natural aging process.

Common health problems:

Cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks and stroke become the major cause of death in both male and female as they reach their middle years. Among the top five causes of mortality are lung and breast cancer, and cirrhosis of the liver. Chronic respiratory disease and hypertension are also major health problems that require continuous and cooperative management on the part of the individual and health care providers. Additional health care needs may be related to sexual dysfunction, and for women, adjustments to menopause.

External and internal factors that contribute to deterioration of health status in the middle-aged are similar to those of young adult.

Nursing measures and health care needs:

Care practices should be related to preserving and prolonging the period of maximum energy and optimal mental social activity. Physical exams should be performed annually at 50 years of age to rule out hypertension, diabetes, respiratory diseases, and cancer. Provide an assessment of nutrition, exercise, occupational hazards, sexual dysfunction, and adjustment to menopause, use of over-the-counter medications, alcohol, and tobacco use.

Education:

Educational techniques are similar to the early adult.
Geriatric Characteristics (65 Years of Age and Over):

The geriatric person is adapting to the physical changes of aging related to the loss of some body cells and a reduction of metabolism. These changes cause a decrease in physical strength and increase susceptibility to fatigue and disease.

They are adjusting to changes in living arrangements relating to changed income associated with retirement, relationships with children, or even the death of a child, spouse, and/or friends. They are learning to accept oneself as an aging person and their life with its joys and limitations. They may be developing a personal view of death, which prepares for the final stage of life.

Physical changes:

- Loss of fat layers on limbs and face and a general decrease in skin turgor
- Perspiration decrease and skin becomes drier
- Changes in skin pigmentation
- Development of gray hair
- Bones become prominent and joints become stiff, as do areas such as the rib cage causing difficulty in breathing
- Shrinkage in intervertebral disc
- Slower voluntary movement
- Sense of smell and taste is less acute
- Slower decision making and startle response
- Increased susceptibility to infection
- Increased susceptibility to high blood pressure
- Visual and hearing acuity decreases and a loss of teeth is likely
- Kidneys are less efficient causing genitourinary problems
- Renal function and bladder capacity decreases
- Decrease in gastrointestinal absorption rate, cardiac output, and airway clearance

Health problems:

The normal aging process places this population at a higher risk for illness and injury, for example:

- Increased risk of strokes, related to decrease in cerebral blood flow
- Increased risk of injury and falls, related to changes in the spine, brittle bones, and osteoporosis (in women)
- Increased risk for heart conditions
- Increased risk of respiratory disease related to the weakening of chest muscles and the inability to clear secretions
- Urinary retention in men related to prostatic hypertrophy
- Increased risk of infection related to the weakening of the immune system
Nursing measures to promote optimization of Individual’s abilities:

1. Re-orient the geriatric Individual to environmental, time, and day, ect. as frequently as necessary.
2. If a deficiency exist on one side of the body, approach and address the Individual form the unaffected side.
3. Use assistive devices such as walkers, canes, wheelchairs, magnifying glasses, ect.
4. Encourage the Individual to participate in as many self-care activities as possible. Provide direct or supportive care as necessary.
5. Institute measures to promote intact skin integrity.
6. Allow ample time for decision making, verbal expression, and activities requiring movement.
7. Encourage visiting from family and/or significant others.
8. Institute measures to prevent physical injuries that may be caused by an unfamiliar environment.
9. Aging individuals often take longer to learn but have not lost the ability to learn. When education a geriatric Individual, keep instructions simple and direct, while using continued reinforcement of instructions.

Education:

Although there are significant changes related to the aging process, there are many myths as well. Remember that the following are myths, will help when working with older adults.

- Most older people are senile (Actually fewer than 20% have measurable memory impairment).
- Most older people feel miserable most of the time (Studies have shown that older people are just happy as they were when they were younger)
- Most older people cannot work as effectively as younger people (Studies show that older workers are more consistent in their work, have fewer accidents, less absenteeism, and less job turnovers than younger workers)
- Most older adults are unhealthy and need to help with activities of daily living. (Actually, 80% of older adults are healthy enough to maintain a normal lifestyle)
- Older people are set in their ways (People do tend to become more stable as they grow older, but they remain able to adapt to changes. Actually an older adult may have to adjust to more lifestyle changes than a younger person does)