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Exploring Registered Health Professionals' Assessment of Older Adults in Care Facilities

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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Turitea Campus, Palmerston North
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by
Sylvia Roeters,
(Sebilla Wilhelmina Petronella Maria)

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Abstract

Older adults in care facilities are increasingly frail, with a number of co-existing conditions and complex health care needs. Before entry into a care facility, and while they are residing in a care facility, older adults are assessed by health professionals from different disciplines. The aim of this research is to gain insight into registered health professionals'¹ understanding of assessment of older adults in care facilities and how these assessments are utilised by Registered Nurses to create a plan for care. Assessment is an integral part of clinical practice for health professionals. Health professionals assess older adults to plan and deliver care, to instruct others about the care to be provided to the older adult, and to meet contract and audit requirements. For this pilot project, fourteen health professionals who perform assessments of older adults in care facilities participated in this research. Participants were approached via their place of employment. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysed by Thematic Content Analysis.

The following theme was clearly identified in this research:

- Fragmentation of the assessment and care planning process,

with sub-themes related to

- human resource issues
- the focus on physical aspects by contracted health professionals
- the single-discipline approach to care planning
- the lack of formal information sharing

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Registered health professionals: For this research, the term 'Registered health professionals' includes Dietitians, Diversional Therapists, General Practitioners, Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists, Physiotherapists, Registered Nurses and Social Workers, who are employed or contracted by a care facility.

- the lack of a unified understanding of multidisciplinary team dynamics
- the positive approach of staff who choose to work in Aged Care

The overriding theme of fragmentation in assessment and care planning is a concern for the care delivery to older adults and is a barrier to providing a continuum of care. Recommendations for further research include:

- the use of the care plans by qualified and nonqualified staff
- the functioning of multidisciplinary teams in Aged Care
- the relationship between education and practice in Aged Care
- the relationship between clinical assessment as part of health professionals' practice and assessment for audit and contractual purposes.

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