Background and Significance: Coupled with the burgeoning aging population is the fact that geriatric content in baccalaureate nursing schools has traditionally been lean. Despite recent efforts by the John A. Hartford Foundation and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (ACCN) to prepare faculty to teach geriatric nursing and to integrate geriatric content into curriculums, a significant number of nurses practicing in acute care completed their education a decade or more ago and received no benefit. According to the Wisconsin Center for Nursing, registered nurses practicing in Wisconsin have an average of 15 years of experience, therefore it is important that health care facilities understand the level of knowledge and expertise in geriatric nursing that currently exists among its care providers.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was twofold:

1) To describe the perceptions of the geriatric care environment and practice related to geriatric care among the direct care staff members.

2) To describe the level of knowledge related to the management of four common geriatric syndromes (i.e., pressure ulcers, sleep, restraints, and incontinence) among the registered nursing staff.

Sample/Setting: This study was conducted at a local health-system with two hospitals. A total of 1000 surveys were distributed between the two hospitals. The survey completion rate at Hospital A and Hospital B were 24% and 12.5%, respectfully.

Method: This study used a descriptive design with a survey methodology. The survey used was the Geriatric Institutional Assessment Profile (GIAP). The GIAP is a valid and reliable tool to evaluate knowledge and attitudes related to geriatric care as well as perceptions of the care environment and professional issues. All surveys were submitted anonymously and data was aggregated by hospital department for analysis.

Results: Overall, the perception of the care environment and professional issues related to geriatric care was significantly more positive than national benchmarks. However the perception of the “intensity of behavioral problems” among older adults was identified as a concern across departments. Overall, the RNs knowledge of geriatric syndromes and attitudes towards geriatric care in most inpatient departments scored significantly higher than national benchmarks, while in select ambulatory departments the scores were significantly lower.

Conclusion: Results suggest that the perception of the geriatric care environment and professional issues are positive with an opportunity to examine the management of geriatric patients with behavioral problems. In addition, there is an opportunity to provide and promote education related to the four common geriatric syndromes in select ambulatory departments.