

# ATTITUDES OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS TOWARD OLDER ADULTS

## THE PROBLEM

- >Previous research has indicated that health care professional students have negative attitudes toward older adults (Eynard & Douglas, 2012; Ryan & McCauley, 2005; Söderhamn et al., 2001)
- >With the aging of the baby boomer generation, health care professionals cannot avoid caring for older adults
- >If caregivers have negative attitudes toward older adults, they may not provide optimal care (Jacelon, 2002)

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the attitudes of health care professional students toward adults 65 years of age and older?
2. What personal characteristics (age, gender, educational level, race) of health care professional students are related to their attitudes towards older adults?
3. What is the relationship between health care professional students' personal experiences with older adults, clinical experiences with older adults, and knowledge about older adults and their attitudes towards older adults?



**Michele M. Shuman, DNP, RN, CCRN-K**  
Gwynedd Mercy University, Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania

## INSTRUMENT

### Carolina Opinion on Care of Older Adults (COCOA)

- >Developed at the University of North Carolina Medical School to measure medical students' attitudes toward older adults
- >Cronbach's reliability coefficient for original study-0.801
- >Cronbach's reliability coefficient for current study-0.842

## PERTINENT FINDINGS

- >Unlike some previous studies, students in this study have very positive attitudes toward older adults
- >Strongest correlation to students' attitudes toward older adults was the number of close personal relationships they had with older adults
- >In agreement with previous studies, there was a significant but weak correlation between students' attitudes and their knowledge of older adults
- >A significant but weak correlation was found between students' attitudes and their age and educational level, which also replicated previous results

## IMPLICATIONS

- >Findings from this study underscore the need for gerontology education for all health care professional students
  - >More continuing education programs regarding care of older adults should be offered for health professionals already in the field, since there is a correlation between knowledge and positive attitudes
- >Programs to reform health care delivery models for older adult health care must be given priority in Congress

## DESIGN

- >descriptive
- >exploratory

## SETTING

A large, Catholic university in an urban setting in northeast Pennsylvania

## SAMPLE

A convenience sample of 119 health care professional students from:

- >occupational therapy
- >nursing
- >physical therapy
- >exercise science
- >community health education
- >rehabilitation counseling

The sample was:

- 93% <25 years old
- 89.3% female
- 90.8% Caucasian

