

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topics and Key Features for the Assessment of Competence in Care of the Elderly

This collection of priority topics and key features for assessment was developed by the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) Working Group on the Assessment of Competence in Care of the Elderly from 2013 to 2016. It outlines what to assess to determine competence at the enhanced skills level, following the CFPC's traditional approach to developing priority topics, procedures, and their key features.

The goal of these priority topics and key features is to guide the assessment of competencies required for awarding Certificates of Added Competence (CAC), both for residents in enhanced skills programs and for practice-eligible candidates, and to inform curriculum and training development.

When using this document, it is critical to remember that the priority topics and key features listed are not meant to be an exhaustive scope of practice in care of the elderly, nor do they represent a checklist for the determination of competence. They represent a guide to focus the sampling of performance. When trainees consistently demonstrate most of the key features across a good sample of the priority topics, it can be inferred that they have competence in care of the elderly.

It is also important to bear in mind that, because there is a great overlap between crucial competencies that are required for different priority topics, the tendency was to avoid repetition and list key features selectively.

Successful candidates for a Certificate of Added Competence in Care of the Elderly are expected to have demonstrated core competence in family medicine, including the [Six Essential Skills](#) and [Procedures](#).

The order of the appearance of the priority topics listed reflects the frequency in which the topics appeared in the validation survey.

Finally, this is a living document that will be regularly revisited and updated to ensure its relevance.

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## How the priority topics and key features were developed

The Working Group on the Assessment of Competence in Care of the Elderly (6 members) acted as the nominal group, generating an initial list of priority topics through an individual survey followed by group discussion and consensus. A survey to a larger group of family practitioners (212 recipients at a 19% response rate), representative of physicians from across the country, generated another independent list.

The lists of priority topics generated by the nominal group and the larger reference group were very similar, both in the topics named and the priorities assigned, with a strong positive correlation of 0.68. A final list of 18 priority topics was identified.

Key features were developed and finalized for all topics using the nominal group technique, which included four iterations of individual comments, discussions and consensus building.

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## How to use the priority topics and key features

It is important to note that materials in this booklet are intentionally selective and not comprehensive. It is most desirable and useful to assess what will best discriminate between competent and less competent individuals. Priority topics do not represent an extensive list of topics that should be covered in training, but rather a selective list of areas for assessment that can help teachers/assessors to infer overall competence in care of the elderly. Key features represent the critical or essential steps in the resolution of a clinical situation or problem, so the achievement of underlying competencies can be inferred. All key features refer to observable actions, not knowledge. They do not cover all necessary steps (e.g., history, physical examination, diagnosis, management), but only those that are critical and most likely to be missed.

As such, the priority topics and their features are not meant to be used in a checklist approach when assessing competence. They are best used for guiding assessment efforts (sampling, observation, reflection) over time to build a case for overall competence or the lack thereof. They may also be useful in the following situations:

For trainees:

- Use as a guide for self-reflection on competence and development of a learning plan, particularly prior to and during clinical experiences
- Use as a guide for soliciting feedback from teachers/assessors

For teachers/assessors:

- Compare and contrast materials in this document with your assessment strategies and adjust as necessary
- Use as a guide assessment of your trainees, including soliciting feedback, developing questions to ask trainees, and completing field notes
- Use as a guide to help develop learning plans for your trainees
- Use as a self reflection guide to assess your teaching

For programs:

- Use as assessment standards when making decisions about residents' successful completion of training
- Use as a guide to develop assessment strategies
- Use as a guide to plan curriculum that can adequately expose trainees to the priority topics and procedures

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Working Group on the Assessment of Competence in Care of the Elderly

Marcel Arcand CCFP, FCFP

Lesley Charles CCFP (COE)

Sidney Feldman CFPC (COE), FCFP

Chris Frank CCFP (COE), FCFP

Robert Lam CCFP (COE), FCFP

Pravinsagar Mehta CCFP (COE), FCFP

*Doreen Oneschuk CCFP (PC) - Clinician Educator*

Special thanks to Dr. Tim Allen, past Director of Certification and Assessment, for his guidance and invaluable contribution to this project.

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topics

1. [Medical conditions](#)
2. [Cognitive impairment](#)
3. [Appropriate prescribing](#)
4. [Falls and mobility issues](#)
5. [Teams](#)
6. [Communication](#)
7. [Frailty continuum/spectrum](#)
8. [Decision making and capacity](#)
9. [Family and informal care supports](#)
10. [Care across different settings](#)
11. [Organizing care using community resources](#)
12. [Advance care planning and goals of care](#)
13. [End-of-life care](#)
14. [Depression/anxiety](#)
15. [Delirium](#)
16. [Urinary incontinence](#)
17. [Driving issues](#)
18. [Pain](#)

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 1: Medical conditions

1. When assessing an elderly patient:
  - a) Consider special conditions that may require assistance or intervention to obtain a full and accurate history (e.g., hearing impairment, language barrier, cultural differences, speech difficulties, cognitive impairment)
  - b) Obtain and integrate collateral information (with consent) when appropriate to aid in the patient's medical assessment
2. When assessing an elderly patient, consider atypical presentations of diseases in your differential diagnosis.
3. For an elderly patient, tailor preventive care as appropriate to age, functional status, and life expectancy (e.g., cancer and cholesterol screening, falls and fracture prevention).
4. When assessing and managing an elderly patient's medical condition, consider the contributions and impact of comorbidities, frailty, and functional status, as these can affect clinical outcomes, prognosis, longevity, and the patient's treatment choices and preferences.
5. For an elderly patient, recognize medical conditions (e.g., systolic hypertension/orthostatic hypotension, diabetes mellitus, atrial fibrillation, thyroid disorders) that need special attention or unique management.
6. When caring for an elderly patient with multiple comorbidities:
  - a) Prioritize medical condition(s) that warrant more immediate assessment and management, being guided by patient goals
  - b) Recognize that recommendations from disease-specific guidelines may not apply, and may increase the likelihood of issues such as excessive testing and polypharmacy
  - c) Ensure that treatment of one condition does not worsen another
7. When caring for an elderly patient:
  - a) Recognize that deterioration can occur rapidly
  - b) Respond quickly to lessen the risk of long-term functional disability, morbidity, and mortality
8. For elderly patients with functional decline who have potential for improvement:
  - a) Consider a rehabilitative approach
  - b) Use community resources to facilitate the re-engagement of an elderly patient back into community life after hospitalization or in-patient rehabilitation

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 2: Cognitive impairment

See also: [Dementia](#) under Evaluation Objectives in Family Medicine

1. For an elderly patient for whom there are concerns about memory problems, determine the level of cognitive impairment and the impact on function by:
  - a) Using a structured history (e.g., neuro-behavioural symptoms, cognitive features, and impact on function)
  - b) Including collateral sources (with consent)
2. For an elderly patient for whom there are concerns about memory problems, differentiate between normal aging, mild cognitive impairment, and dementia.
3. For an elderly patient for whom memory problems are recognized as normal aging:
  - a) Avoid over-investigation
  - b) Develop a follow-up plan with the patient
4. For an elderly patient with mild cognitive impairment (MCI), establish the level on the spectrum.
5. For an elderly patient presenting with behavioural changes or other subtle cues (e.g., uncertainty about recent events, changes in personal hygiene or medication compliance, concerns from family, dysphasia):
  - a) Consider cognitive impairment in the differential diagnosis
  - b) Assess using objective cognitive testing when appropriate
6. For an elderly patient presenting with worsening dementia, assess appropriately to rule out delirium and depression.
7. For an elderly patient presenting with cognitive or memory problems, rule out remediable factors (e.g., malnutrition, thyroid disease, vitamin B deficiency, progressive subdural, normal pressure hydrocephalus, other metabolic disorders).
8. For an elderly patient presenting with dementia, investigate selectively, according to accepted guidelines and the patient's context, to identify the type of dementia (i.e., Alzheimer, mixed, vascular, Lewy body, fronto-temporal, other).
9. When an elderly patient has an atypical presentation of dementia (e.g., younger, rapid progression, focal neurological manifestations, not responding or unexpected adverse reactions to treatment),
  - a) Review the accuracy of the current working diagnosis
  - b) Consider the merits of seeking a second opinion
10. For an elderly patient being followed for dementia, avoid unexpected decompensation or crisis by actively enquiring about:
  - Behaviours
  - Psychological or psychiatric symptoms

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

## Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills Key Features

April 2017

- Issues of safety and risk (e.g., driving, abuse, wandering, cooking safety, occupational and social hazards)
11. For an elderly patient with a newly established diagnosis of dementia, share early and appropriately with caregivers and the patient the diagnosis and the management options to ensure:
    - Early advance planning
    - Use of appropriate pharmacological options for management (e.g., cognitive enhancers)
    - Social support for patients and family (e.g., Alzheimer's society, other community organizations)
  12. For an elderly patient with progressing dementia, continue to actively engage the patient in a process of shared decision making, even as their capacity continues to decline.
  13. For an elderly patient with dementia who develops behavioural changes:
    - a) Inquire about the impact on the patient and the caregivers
    - b) Rigorously assess (e.g., evolution of change, thorough history examination and chart review) the underlying causes of the changes
  14. When managing an elderly patient with dementia and behavioural changes:
    - a) Correct and/or treat any underlying causes
    - b) Develop and implement a non-pharmacological plan of management with the caregivers and the resources in the community
    - c) Use pharmacological treatment judiciously, reserving the use of antipsychotic medications for emergency situations and for those patients with distressing psychosis, severe physical aggression, or agitation who have not improved with non-pharmacological methods
    - d) Consider gradual dose reduction of medications as soon as possible
  15. For elderly patients with mild-to-moderate dementia:
    - a) Consider treatment with a cholinesterase inhibitor for patients without contraindications (e.g., heart block, bradycardia, syncope, significant frailty)
    - b) Develop a plan for follow-up to review effectiveness/outcomes and side effects of treatment to decide collaboratively with patient and caregivers whether to continue or discontinue the medication
  16. For elderly patients with severe dementia:
    - a) Make decisions to continue or stop cognitive enhancers after discussions with corroborating sources about past benefits, side effects, and goals of treatment
    - b) If the decision is made to stop the medication(s), titrate with close monitoring for rapid or unexpected cognitive decline



# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 3: **Appropriate prescribing**

1. When caring for an elderly patient:
  - a) Review adherence and update medication lists regularly, especially during transitions (e.g., a move to long-term care, or a diagnosis or progression of terminal illness), including non-prescription, over-the-counter medications, and natural health products in order to identify risks of interactions, side effects, inappropriate use, or treatments that are no longer indicated
  - b) Consider collaborating with a clinical pharmacist
2. When an elderly patient shows functional decline or non-specific symptoms, always consider and rule out the possible contribution of their medications to the situation.
3. When caring for an elderly patient, take a methodical approach to prescribing:
  - Stop medications that are no longer needed, may be harmful, or may interact with other beneficial prescribed medications
  - Whenever possible, make only one change at a time (e.g., medication for behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia)
  - Educate the patient and caregiver about each medication and the rationale for any change
4. Select and prescribe a new medication for an elderly patient only after considering:
  - The patient's goals and their overall prognosis
  - The benefits (i.e., don't assume that harms are greater than benefits just because the patient is elderly)
  - The altered pharmacodynamics and pharmacokinetics of many drugs in elderly patients
  - Drug interactions
  - The estimated risk-benefit of the treatment, as compared to other choices
  - Adherence and appropriate medication delivery due to age-related changes (e.g., hand dexterity and strength, memory, swallowing)
5. For an elderly patient, consider age-related responses and react appropriately (e.g., changed pharmacodynamics, —start low, go slow)

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 4: Falls and mobility issues

1. For the ongoing care of any elderly patient, periodically assess for unreported falls and the risk of falls, and discuss strategies for the prevention of falls.
2. For an elderly patient who is at a risk of falling or has fallen:
  - a) Consider and inquire about possible predisposing and precipitating factors, and do not assume a single cause: obtain corroborative history (with consent), clarifying the circumstances of the fall (e.g., tripping, short loss of consciousness, presence of seizure)
  - b) Perform an appropriate physical examination focusing on neurological, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems with a particular emphasis on assessing gait, but also ensuring the assessment of other possible precipitants (e.g., pneumonia, urinary retention, urinary tract infection)
3. For an elderly patient who has had an acute fall, assess for the presence of injuries that are not obvious (e.g., fractured hip, C-spine, subdural hematoma), in addition to diagnosing and treating the specific cause(s) of the fall itself.
4. For an elderly patient who is at risk of falling, or has fallen, carefully review and use all medications judiciously (e.g., psychoactive, anti-hypertensive, Parkinsonian), optimizing doses or eliminating entirely, to minimize the risk of contributing to falls.
5. For an elderly patient who is at risk for falling, in addition to managing the primary cause(s) of the falls, plan the active reinforcement of capacities that are “working” and that may help the patient to avoid further falling (e.g., walking and balance aids, visual/hearing aids, balance or strengthening therapy, community resources, protection as necessary, home safety assessment).
6. For an elderly patient who has fallen or is at risk of falling, consider osteoporosis and fracture risk as part of falls risk assessment and treat appropriately.
7. For an elderly patient who is at risk of falling, consider the use of an appropriate gait aid, ensuring that it is the proper size, and is used appropriately.
8. For an elderly patient who is at a risk of falling, discuss strategies in the event of fall, including using an emergency alert system.
9. For an elderly patient:
  - a) Inquire about and assess the fear of falls as it may have a large social impact
  - b) Develop strategies to mitigate the likelihood of social isolation and loss of independence

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 5: Teams

1. For elderly patients, use a team approach as appropriate (e.g., rehabilitation, falls assessment, discharge planning).
2. When caring for elderly patients with a team:
  - a) Show respect for the other team members by encouraging safety and trust within the team
  - b) Ensure effective shared goals and desired outcomes supported by all team members
  - c) Be prepared to assume various roles within the team (e.g., collaborator, leader)
3. When caring for elderly patients:
  - a) Include the patient and family in the team discussions and conferences whenever practical
  - b) Facilitate the patient's and the family's effective participation in decision making

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 6: Communication

(see also [Communication Skills for Family Medicine](#))

1. When communicating with elderly patients:
  - a) Recognize the multiple and complex barriers to good communication (e.g., adequate time, pace, noise level, language, need for assistive devices, delirium, generational response)
  - b) Use strategies to mitigate the barriers (e.g., optimize physical environment, use active listening, provide access to interpreter)
2. When communicating with elderly patients and their caregivers (e.g., family conference), ensure that the patient's voice is heard and respected.
3. Regarding elderly patients with cognitive impairment, continue to include them in clinical discussions when appropriate.
4. For situations of potential conflict (e.g., when an elderly patient's goals of care differ from the wishes of their children, when there are differences between the views of joint substitute decision makers (SDM), or between the family and the health providers)
  - a) Mediate and attempt to resolve the conflict
  - b) Recognize the situations when the involvement of others is required (e.g., family doctor, ethicist, spiritual advisor, lawyer)

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 7: **Frailty continuum/spectrum**

1. For the ongoing care of any elderly patient:
  - a) Regularly assess the degree of frailty considering their ability to function safely in their environment with their current social support (e.g., functional status and reserve; physiological characteristics such as gait speed, nutritional status, and weight loss; comorbidities)
  - b) Share this information with the patient, encouraging and promoting activities that will help them maintain function
2. For frail elderly patients:
  - a) Do not assume a loss of decision-making capacity
  - b) Adapt the treatment and preventive care (e.g., do not over-treat just to follow generic guidelines, do not under-treat simply because of the patient's age)
3. For the ongoing care of a frail or elderly patient, regularly review all medications, with a focus on de-prescribing, as polypharmacy and inattentive prescribing can worsen frailty.
4. Whenever a frail elderly patient shows a sudden decline in function, do not assume it is a simple progression of the overall condition, but look for and rule out acute precipitating cause(s) (e.g., delirium, infection).
5. For a frail elderly patient with an acute illness associated with acute loss of function:
  - a) Adopt an early and aggressive multi-faceted assessment and management plan (e.g., hydration, treatment of infection, medication review) to minimize loss of function
  - b) Develop a rehabilitation plan to help the patient regain the previous level of functioning. (e.g., day hospital, home visits, interdisciplinary interventions)
  - c) Consider re-establishing goals of care
6. For a frail elderly patient, whose condition and burden of illness are advancing, in spite of regular assessment, maintenance, and treatment, take the initiative to revisit the living situation, the goals of care, and advance planning with the patient and their caregivers.

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 8: Decision making and capacity

1. When recommending a specific treatment to an elderly patient, establish their capacity to consent by assessing their understanding and appreciation of the choices and the possible consequences of each choice (e.g., by asking specific questions, getting collateral information, asking patients to paraphrase).
2. When assessing the capacity of an elderly patient:
  - a) Do not assume that a patient who is at an advanced age or has dementia is incapable of making all treatment decisions
  - b) Do not assume that incapacity to make one decision renders a patient incapable of all decisions
  - c) Consider acute health conditions or circumstances that may temporarily affect capacity, or cause it to fluctuate
  - d) Recognize that the greater the risk resulting from a particular decision, the greater capacity that is required
3. When an elderly patient makes a decision that appears to be unwise from the perspective of the health care team:
  - a) Assess the patient's capacity
  - b) Respect the capable patient's right to make choices you do not approve of (e.g., capable patients can decide to live at risk or leave hospital against medical advice)
4. When a substitute decision maker (SDM) is making decisions for an incapable patient:
  - a) Ensure an SDM (or joint SDMs) understands their role in making decisions that are consistent with the patient's known wishes and in their best interest
  - b) Advocate for the incapable patient if a SDM makes a decision that is not in keeping with the patient's known wishes or in their best interest (e.g., consult an expert in ethics, refer to appropriate review authorities)
5. When an elderly patient is found to be incapable, inform the patient and their substitute decision maker (SDM), in a caring and compassionate manner, of the finding and the possible options, including the right to appeal.

Note: Refer to topic 17 for [driving issues](#).

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 9: Family and informal care supports

1. When caring for an elderly patient:
  - a) Assess the family/caregivers to gauge their level of stress and capacity (e.g., cognitive, physical, social) to provide the necessary care and support
  - b) Be proactive to reduce the risk of caregiver exhaustion (e.g., provide education, training, and resources; work with other health care providers to optimize support at home; advocate for additional resources when required)
2. When assessing a change in condition or function, or a crisis in an elderly patient:
  - a) Evaluate the contribution of their social and home environment to this change
  - b) Determine the need for immediate intervention, including a home visit to mitigate harm; direct (e.g., wandering leading to hypothermia) or indirect (e.g., move from home, hospitalization leading to functional loss)
3. In situations of caregiver stress, consider:
  - Risk of elder abuse of the patient
  - Risk for mistreatment of the caregiver

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 10: Care across different settings

1. When caring for an elderly patient in different settings (e.g., in their home, in a community-based location, or preparing to return to the community from hospital), familiarize yourself with available community resources and use them when and where appropriate.
2. When seeing an elderly patient in the office, recognize they may not be doing as well in their home environment as they may appear to be in the office setting.
3. When caring for an elderly patient in any clinical setting, engage interdisciplinary team members to provide care.
4. When caring for an elderly patient, especially when transferring health care information (including patient's goals of care and updated medication records), ensure ongoing communication across settings with:
  - Formal and informal community support providers, including family members
  - Emergency department and hospital staff, as these are high-risk environments
5. When considering transferring an elderly patient to a different care setting, make plans that take into account the patient's goals of care and advance care wishes.



# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 11: Organizing care using community resources

1. When developing plans for support and care for an elderly patient, reach out proactively to integrate and engage community and other professional resources (e.g., case managers, social workers)
2. When using community resources for the care of an elderly patient, consider all available resources and match the patient's needs to the specific resources available, including privately and publicly funded services (e.g., Alzheimer society, government home care services).
3. For an elderly patient who is receiving care and support from community resources:
  - a) Maintain an active, ongoing therapeutic relationship with the patient
  - b) Ensure an effective exchange of information between all care providers

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 12: Advance care planning and goals of care

1. When caring for an elderly patient, encourage them to discuss their goals and treatment preferences and, based on these, develop a plan that meets provincial/territorial legal requirements.
2. When caring for an elderly patient, find opportunities to introduce discussions about goals of care before the patient's capacity is reduced, especially when loss of capacity can be anticipated (e.g., very advanced age, malignancy, cognitive decline, multiple comorbidities, Parkinson disease).
3. When initiating a discussion on goals of care with an elderly patient, ensure that:
  - It takes place in a manner that facilitates the patient's full understanding and participation in the process
  - The patient has the capacity to participate in any necessary decisions
4. When discussing goals of care with an elderly patient:
  - a) Empathically provide frank and clear information about prognosis and reasonable therapeutic options
  - b) Help the patient prioritize goals of care that reflect their values, preferences and concerns
5. When establishing goals of care with an elderly patient:
  - a) Take the time necessary (i.e., multiple sessions may be required) to come to clear understanding and decisions, including time for reflection and reconsideration,
  - b) Encourage full discussion with care partners and SDMs, should they need to take over decision making, so that they may act according to the patient's wishes and best interests
6. For an elderly patient experiencing significant change (e.g., new diagnosis, significant functional loss, social change, or transitions to new living or care setting), initiate a re-evaluation of the goals of care.
7. For an elderly patient who no longer has the capacity to decide:
  - a) Do not equate previously-established goals of care with a specific consent to treatment
  - b) Use the goals as a guide to help the SDM make decisions, particularly where they may conflict with their own values or preferences
8. For an elderly patient receiving different recommendations from multiple consulting physicians and other health care professionals, help the patient balance these options in relation to their own goals of care.
9. When receiving a request for a treatment of an elderly patient, that is unlikely to be of benefit or that you would not recommend:
  - a) Listen carefully to try to fully understand the patient's perspective before presenting yours
  - b) Attempt to find common ground for moving forward, while continuing to care for the patient

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 13: End-of-life care

1. For an elderly patient with a severe or an end-stage condition:
  - a) Recognize as early as possible that the end of life is or may be near
  - b) Communicate this to the patient and family at the earliest appropriate moment
2. When communicating with an elderly patient who is approaching end of life, and their family, be empathic and patient-centred in order to facilitate a discussion about goals of care:
  - Consider and respect the cultural and personal perspectives of the patient and family, especially when they differ from yours
  - Be realistic without being negative and always be supportive, recognizing your own values and perspectives; do not impose them on the patient
3. When caring for an elderly patient who is at the end of life:
  - a) Assess for symptoms that may be distressing and amenable to treatment
  - b) Pay particular attention to non-verbal indicators of distress and collateral information in patients with a diminished capacity to communicate (e.g., decreased alertness, confusion, aphasia)
  - c) Use validated assessment tools as appropriate
4. When caring for an elderly patient who is at the end of life:
  - a) Review all medications with a view to continuing and adjusting those that contribute to the patient's well-being
  - b) Reduce or discontinue medications that do not have current beneficial effects, or potential for benefit over the expected life of the patient, and may decrease the patient's well-being
5. When treating symptoms in an elderly patient who is at the end of life:
  - a) Use a multi-faceted approach (e.g., pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatment, interdisciplinary approach) to achieve comfort
  - b) Anticipate adverse effects and treat proactively
  - c) Review and adjust the treatment according to the response and overall well-being
6. When an elderly patient, who is at the end of life, wishes to stay at home:
  - a) Anticipate the support and resources that will be needed, including your own availability and participation
  - b) Help the patient and caregivers develop plans to deal with all the situations that may arise, including caregivers' bereavement
7. For the elderly patient who has requested Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID):
  - a) Explore the meaning behind the request and consider the patient's capacity
  - b) Follow all relevant federal/provincial/territorial legislation and College policies as they apply to the patient

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 14: Depression/anxiety

1. For an elderly patient with a presentation that is atypical for depression (e.g., fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, agitation, somatisation) look for and recognize depression.
2. For an elderly patient who is taking anti-depressant medications, clarify the original indication, reassess the effectiveness and need for ongoing therapy.
3. For an elderly patient who is depressed or anxious, assess to rule out underlying medical conditions or co-morbidities that may be causative or contributing.
4. For elderly patients who may have dementia:
  - a) Always consider depression and anxiety as a factor in the presentation
  - b) Regularly look for depression/anxiety in any patient with existing dementia
5. When treating an elderly patient, who has depression:
  - a) Use non-pharmacological strategies (e.g., mindfulness, cognitive behavioural therapy)
  - b) Engage community resources effectively to provide therapy, support and socialisation for the patient and their caregivers
6. For an elderly patient who has depression always consider and assess for the risk of suicide.
7. For an elderly patient who has depression, look for psychotic features (e.g., paranoia, delusions, marked withdrawal).
8. When using pharmacotherapy to treat depression in an elderly patient:
  - a) Select an agent with an activity profile and side effects that are appropriate to the patient's symptoms and comorbidities
  - b) Introduce slowly, titrate, and adjust according to response and side effects
9. For an elderly patient who has depression and is not responding well to treatment:
  - a) Review the diagnosis, particularly with respect to psychiatric and other co-morbidities
  - b) Consider the need for consultation for more intensive therapy, such as electroconvulsive therapy and in-patient psychiatric care

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 15: Delirium

1. For any elderly patient with discrete or fluctuating changes in attention or awareness:
  - a) Consider the possibility of a diagnosis of delirium
  - b) Act promptly to clarify the diagnosis
2. For an elderly patient with dementia presenting with confusion, change in arousal, or behavioural change:
  - a) Do not assume that the change is progression of underlying dementia
  - b) Assess to distinguish between delirium, dementia, and depression
3. For an elderly patient with decreased arousal, consider hypoactive delirium.
4. For an elderly patient with symptoms or signs suggesting delirium, look for underlying and contributing causes, and continue the assessment to ensure a comprehensive review of possibilities, keeping in mind that the cause of delirium is often multifactorial (e.g., infection, new medication, dehydration, metabolic disturbances).
5. For all elderly patients:
  - a) Proactively identify situations in which delirium is more likely to occur (e.g., dementia, post-operative, acute infection)
  - b) Take steps to prevent the onset of delirium (e.g., review of medications, hydration, orientation strategies)
6. When managing delirium in an elderly patient:
  - a) Always include non-pharmacologic measures, such as physical touch, familiar faces, and orientation strategies in the treatment plan
  - b) Keep in mind the high risk associated with the use of physical restraints (e.g., death, asphyxiation, increased agitation)
7. For an elderly patient with delirium, while continuing to diagnose and treat the underlying causes, only use a short-term antipsychotic if absolutely necessary for patient safety or distress, and reduce or stop the medication as soon as possible.
8. For an elderly patient with delirium, communicate the possible duration and outcomes of an episode of delirium with the patient and family, focussing on communicating uncertainty.

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 16: Urinary incontinence

1. When providing ongoing care for any elderly patient:
  - a) Periodically ask, in a sensitive manner, about the presence or absence of urinary incontinence
  - b) Specifically assess the impact it may have on the patient's daily life and functioning
2. For an elderly patient with a complaint of urinary incontinence, explore whether medical/functional issues (e.g., such as constipation, poor mobility, pain or bathroom apraxia, medications) may play a contributing role.
3. For an elderly patient with a complaint of new onset urinary incontinence, use a systematic approach to establishing as exact an etiological diagnosis as possible.
4. For an elderly patient, treat urinary incontinence according to the etiological subtypes identified, (e.g., use lifestyle, behaviour modifications, physiotherapy, pessaries, surgical intervention).
5. When treating an elderly patient for incontinence, use pharmacotherapy judiciously, by balancing potential side effects and benefits.

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 17: Driving issues

1. When caring for an elderly patient, explore whether:
  - The individual is driving
  - There might be health-related driving risks
2. For an elderly patient with a progressive disease (e.g., Parkinson disease, dementia) who continues to drive:
  - a) Introduce an early discussion about driving issues, well before it is a problem that needs to be dealt with (not if but when)
  - b) Help the patient adjust and plan appropriately
  - c) Reassess regularly
3. When assessing an elderly patient's capacity to drive, look for and address potentially remedial factors that may affect this capacity (e.g., depression and anxiety, prescription and non-prescription drugs, alcohol, acute illness, poor driving habits, visual impairments).
4. When an elderly patient's capacity to drive is not clear, after obtaining consent, get corroborating information from multiple sources (e.g., family input, accident history, functional impairments, fitness-to-drive assessments) before deciding to report this concern to the appropriate authority.
5. For an elderly patient at high risk of losing their driving privileges:
  - a) Use a patient-centred approach to understand the full impact this may have on their life
  - b) Proactively develop suitable alternative strategies
  - c) Provide support throughout the adjustment period
6. For an elderly patient with cognitive impairment:
  - a) Recognize that the presence of moderate or severe dementia is a contraindication to driving
  - b) Recognize that the presence of mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia is not necessarily a contraindication to driving
  - c) Perform a thorough assessment, if the decision is ambiguous, including an on-road assessment if required
7. When an assessment has demonstrated that an elderly patient is no longer medically fit to drive:
  - a) Communicate this clearly to the patient and family
  - b) Counsel them on the immediate or short-term implications for driving
  - c) Follow the provincial legislation regarding the duty to report

# CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Priority Topics for the Assessment of Competence: Enhanced Skills  
Key Features

April 2017

## Priority Topic 18: Pain

1. When determining the etiology of pain in the elderly, account for the greater burden of chronic and complex conditions, both physical and emotional, that may contribute to the perception of pain.
2. When assessing the impact of pain on an elderly person, look holistically for impact and common vulnerabilities (e.g., renal dysfunction, delirium risk, elder abuse) because pain and its pharmacological management can lead rapidly to further disability, vulnerability, and loss of independence.
3. For elderly patients who have a limited ability to express themselves (e.g., cognitive decline, decreased awareness, affective disorder), assess pain by looking for indicators such as discrete physical signs and behaviours, and by obtaining collateral information from others.
4. When using scales and other indicators to serially assess pain in elderly patients, ensure that your assessment accounts for patient specific factors (e.g., meaning of the pain, candidness in the face of authority, cognition, memory loss).
5. When treating an elderly patient, who has pain, use non-pharmacological measures whenever possible (e.g., exercise and stretching, physical modalities and therapy, mindfulness or cognitive behaviour therapy).
6. When selecting a pharmacological treatment for an elderly patient's pain, consider the possible impact of underlying comorbidities or risks (e.g., frailty, decreased renal function, altered sensorium or cognitive function, risk for addiction).
7. When providing pharmacological treatment for elderly patients' pain, integrate principles of prescribing for the elderly (e.g., start low, go slow, watch for interactions, use least effective dose) with a proactive approach to mitigating side effects because of the complex vulnerability often found in this age group.