Registered Nurses explain assessment and identification of delirium among hospitalised older people

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BACKGROUND:
Delirium is a serious and common complication experienced by older people in hospital which may result in dementia, residential relocation and mortality. Internationally, concern about delirium is evidenced by the growth of professional organisations and the increased attention of researchers and educators. Yet delirium remains under-recognised. Current understanding about delirium is focused on improving knowledge and increasing the use of screening tools. This study aims to explain how Registered Nurses (RNs) assess and identify delirium.

METHODS:
A qualitative study sampled 24 RNs with experience in assessing and identifying delirium among older people in a large regional hospital in Australia. Data were generated from group interviews. Concurrent data analysis was undertaken using line-by-line constant comparison. An ethics committee approved the study.

RESULTS:
Three themes – It is my job, It's complex and It's not my job – were generated to explain the experiences of RNs who have assessed and identified delirium among hospitalised older people.

This study confirms previous findings about the importance of delirium knowledge and use of delirium screening tools for effective assessment and identification. New issues identified were the importance of personal responsibilities for developing competency in delirium assessment, perceptions about the diagnosis being stigmatising and the professional boundaries around assessment responsibilities. The findings provide understanding about the challenges and enablers experienced by RNs assessing and identifying delirium in older people in hospital. The evidence is being used to inform education to improve delirium care for older people where the study was undertaken.

REFERENCES: