Definition of gerontological rehabilitation nursing
The Association of Rehabilitation Nurses developed this gerontological rehabilitation nurse role description to identify and clarify the role of rehabilitation nurses who care for geriatric clients and to promote a high degree of professionalism in keeping with the established scope and standards of rehabilitation practice.

Gerontological rehabilitation nursing is a specialty practice that focuses on the unique requirements of elderly rehabilitation clients. Elderly clients can be categorized into the following groups: the young old (65 through 74 years of age), the old (75 through 84 years of age) and the old old, or frail elderly (ages 85 and above) (Schrier, 1990). The older a population is, the less homogeneous it is; therefore, more diverse care is required to meet the needs of the individuals within the population. Consequently, geriatric clients warrant special consideration.

Gerontological rehabilitation nurses consider the normal age-related changes and the functional limitations brought about by illness or injury in elderly people when they help an individual develop a plan of care. Specific disabling conditions and their concomitant medical issues dictate specific rehabilitation nursing interventions and techniques.

Goal
Gerontological rehabilitation nurses use a holistic approach in the assessment and provision of services to geriatric clients. Helping geriatric clients achieve their optimal level of physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being is the primary goal of the gerontological rehabilitation nurse.

Settings
Gerontological rehabilitation nursing services are provided in a wide variety of settings that include hospital-based rehabilitation units, freestanding rehabilitation hospitals, hospital-based skilled nursing facilities, acute care units, subacute units, long-term care facilities, residential care facilities, home health agencies, private and agency clinics, and governmental agencies. Nurses with advanced education and certification also can practice independently as gerontological nurse practitioners or clinical nurse specialists. Other nurses practice gerontological rehabilitation nursing by teaching or conducting research at the nursing school or at the university level.

Standards
Gerontological rehabilitation nurses adhere to the established rehabilitation nursing standards of care and scope of practice as published by the Association of Rehabilitation Nurses.

Roles of the Gerontological rehabilitation nurse
The gerontological rehabilitation nurse practices in a variety of roles, including, but not limited to, those outlined below.

Advocate: The gerontological rehabilitation nurse advocates for the rights of older persons and works to dispel the myths of aging.

Clinical practitioner: The gerontological rehabilitation nurse practitioner demonstrates clinical expertise in the care provided to aging adults. This expertise includes assessing and identifying problems; planning, intervening in, and evaluating care; and participating in the interdisciplinary plan of care.

Educator: The gerontological rehabilitation nurse educator promotes activities that lead to healthy aging and prevent disability and also provides individualized education for clients and their families. The gerontological rehabilitation nurse is responsible for continually updating his or her knowledge base through in-service education, continuing education, or formal secondary education and training. Networking with other gerontological rehabilitation nurses to share ideas and experiences also expands the professional practice and knowledge base. The gerontological rehabilitation nurse also has a role in educating the public about issues related to aging by giving presentations and by publishing articles on related topics.
Manager: The gerontological nurse manager uses management skills when providing for patient care in a variety of hospital and community settings. The specialized skills and knowledge required for a management position include maintaining up-to-date information about federal and state regulatory statutes as well as information related to funding for elder care programs. The gerontological rehabilitation nurse manager must be proficient in the areas of quality assurance and quality improvement and must be familiar with the requirements of other accrediting bodies such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations and the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

Consultant: The gerontological rehabilitation nurse consultant supports other healthcare practitioners who provide geriatric services. The consultant offers guidance in developing programs such as those on pressure ulcer prevention and care and on clinical issues such as Alzheimer’s disease that typically pertain to an aging population.

Researcher: The gerontological rehabilitation nurse researcher communicates relevant research through presentations at continuing education programs and by writing articles for professional publications. The gerontological rehabilitation nurse researcher participates in rehabilitation research whenever possible and seeks opportunities to develop and conduct research projects.

Reference

This role description was developed by the Association of Rehabilitation Nurses Gerontology Special Interest Group.