

## **Geriatric Nutrition: A Multifocal Challenge**

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Malnutrition is a real problem in older adults. Nutrition also plays an important role in surgical recovery. With nearly 8 million surgical procedures performed annually in older Americans, it becomes critical to expand the science of geriatric nutrition to improve health outcomes and promote recovery in older adults. “As a nutrition support nurse,” Dr. DiMaria-Ghalili notes, “I am in a unique position to blend the rich traditions of geriatrics, nutrition and nursing to expand the science of geriatric nutrition.”

However, Dr. DiMaria-Ghalili realized in order to develop her program of research, she needed to hone her research skills in geriatrics and nutrition. To that end, she left a tenured faculty position to become a Claire M. Fagin Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. Her Fellowship project focused on the exploration of the nutritional, inflammatory, and functional factors related to unintentional weight loss in older adults undergoing cardiac surgery, and resultant health outcomes.

The Fellowship enhanced Dr. DiMaria-Ghalili’s career. The Fellowship made it possible for her to collaborate with interdisciplinary experts to incorporate biomarkers of nutrition and inflammation into her research model. The information gained from her project will serve as preliminary data for an NIH R01 grant application.

During the Fellowship, Dr. DiMaria-Ghalili received accolades for her stellar leadership and research efforts. The American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition named her the 2009 Distinguished Nutrition Support Nurse for her research contributions to the science of nutrition support nursing. She was also recipient of a Clinical Research Poster Award at the University of Pennsylvania’s 2009 Institute of Aging Sylvan M. Cohen Annual Retreat. Finally, she was invited to serve as Associate Editor for a prestigious interdisciplinary journal, the *Journal of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition*.

“I’ve realized through the extensive leadership and research training during the Fellowship, that in order to positively impact the nutritional needs of older adults, a multifocal approach, which I call ‘EATS’, is needed,” says Dr. DiMaria-Ghalili. She plans to address each element of EATS in the next phase of her academic geriatric nursing career as follows:

E: Evaluate the curriculum of nursing programs in regards to nutrition education,

A: Assessment standardization of the nutritional needs of older adults at the point of nursing care,

T: Test interdisciplinary interventions focused on improving nutrition and promoting positive health outcomes for older adults, and

S: expand the Science of geriatric nutrition, with a goal to develop an intellectual home for nurse scientists focused on nutrition and feeding in older adults.

Dr. DiMaria-Ghalili highly recommends the BAGNC Fellowship program to others. She believes the benefits of the program include the individualized professional development plan, superb mentorship by outstanding HCGNE researchers, the camaraderie of other Fellows, and recognition as a geriatric nurse leader. She adds, "The recognition extends beyond nursing. As a 2007-2009 Claire M. Fagin Fellow, I have been sought out for my expertise by interdisciplinary professionals outside of nursing".