

Theoretical Framework

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Andragogy, an adult learning theory, is a term coined by Malcolm Shepherd Knowles and is often adopted in competency-based medical education. This theory acts as a theoretical framework for this quality improvement project of adult learners in a graduate-level nurse anesthesia program. Critical features of andragogy are autonomous, self-directed, and interactive learning, where learners are more motivated by internal than external drives (Sharma et al., 2020).

Knowles identifies five key assumptions of andragogy. First, specific to adult learners, self-concept allows a student to act independently in a self-directed manner. They accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. Their readiness to learn becomes increasingly oriented to the developmental tasks of their social roles. Their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness. Lastly, as a person matures, the motivation to learn becomes internal (Knowles et al., 2012).

Knowles recognizes four main principles of andragogy. First, adults need to be involved in planning and evaluating their instruction. Second, experience provides the basis for learning activities. Third, adults are most interested in learning topics that directly impact their job or personal life. Lastly, adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (Pappas, 2013).

Adults learn in specific ways, and andragogy allows educators to understand this process. This quality improvement project aims at facilitating learning of neuraxial anesthesia, and andragogy will be used as the theoretical framework to accomplish this goal.