The generation that proclaimed “Trust no one over 30” has now reached twice that age. Hoping that jazzercise and low-fat diets could indefinitely forestall the effects of aging, the Baby Boomers have discovered instead that there is no suspending the laws of biology. They have entered the world of chronic age-related illness and impairment.

Enter the gerontological nurse practitioner, like Dr. Millicent Malcolm (above right), UConn School of Nursing assistant clinical professor. With 30 years of clinical gerontological experience and the expertise honed by a UConn DNP degree, Malcolm brings interprofessional experience to advanced practice students and now leads a major federally funded project to improve primary care of older adults, preventing an excessive reliance on emergency department interventions.
"I began as a nursing assistant in high school," Malcolm observes. "I earned my BS in nursing in 1986 and spent most of the next 13 years as an RN working with older persons on a medical/surgical unit and then in long term care facilities. Through my work with older persons as an RN, I witnessed the need for advanced practice nursing care for geriatric patients."

After earning the master’s degree in nursing from UConn and qualifying as a gerontological nurse practitioner, Malcolm has spent the past decade and a half with Middlesex Hospital Primary Care in Middletown, seeing patients in sub-acute rehabilitation, long-term care, assisted living, and rest home facilities. She also developed a house call practice with a large number of patients who are no longer able to come to the office due to their advanced age, serious medical conditions, and frailty.

Upon earning the DNP from UConn, Malcolm joined the School of Nursing faculty. "I wanted not only to learn about implementing evidence based practice through quality improvement, which is a hallmark of the DNP program," Malcolm explains, "but also wanted to prepare myself to educate future nurse practitioners to the special needs and care of older persons."

A major opportunity to fund such comprehensive interprofessional education came in 2012 when Dean Regina Cusson invited Malcolm to submit to the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration an application for a $1.4 million Interprofessional Education and Practice grant. Malcolm proposed Geriatric Outreach and Training with Care (GOT Care!).

Anyone familiar with the federal grant funding landscape knows that it is highly competitive, but in recent years political wrangling and gridlock on Capitol Hill has made funding even less certain. Malcolm’s grant application was approved but Congressional politicians’ so-called "budget sequester" eliminated the funds. Persistence, resilience, and tenacity (all hallmarks of nursing) eventually paid off: GOT Care! was approved for funding in 2014.

The GOT Care! team includes clinical faculty with geriatric expertise from nursing, medicine, dental medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, social work, and public health. Under nursing leadership, GOT Care! provides opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in health fields to gain critical knowledge and experience in the care of vulnerable older persons with multiple chronic conditions in an effort to improve specific healthcare outcomes. This training also advances care for military veterans, by including education and practice in targeted assessments.

As Malcolm observes, “In GOT Care! we teach the important concepts of interprofessional practice at the beginning of each semester, then take these trained students into the field with the interprofessional faculty, to see how we as a team actually execute this work in the field of geriatrics.”

Dr. Millicent Malcolm was awarded the 2015 AANP Nurse Practitioner State Award for Excellence. The award is given annually to a dedicated nurse practitioner in each state who has demonstrated excellence in their area of practice. Dr. Malcolm was nominated for the award based on her work building an inter-professional collaborative practice team to provide interdisciplinary health care education for students working with a geriatric population.