



Social Isolation and Well Being Among Older Adults During COVID-19

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Learning Objectives

- Identify the impact of social isolation among older adults during COVID-19
- Examine new mental/physical health concerns experienced by older adults during COVID-19
- Share treatment Interventions and creative activities with and among the care provider community





Present Messaging Impact on Elders

- Stay at home and quarantine
- Do not go shopping, have it delivered (i.e. Groceries, medications, have items dropped at your door, operate in a touchless environment)
- In Long-term care facilities: (nursing homes/assisted living facilities), stay in your rooms sometimes with incompatible roommates
- In congregate living: stay in your apartments
- And elders then often listen to additional instructions and messages given by family members





Impact (Continued)

- Sheltering in place and stay-at-home orders cause the usual social support in-person networks to change and go away
 - Gone are:
 - Congregate meals
 - Exercise activities
 - In person business appointments
 - Family events
 - Religious engagements
 - Social activities
 - In person health appointments
 - Weddings
 - Graduations
 - Wakes and funerals





Social Isolation and Loneliness

- Does social isolation cause loneliness?
 - How to make a difference for elders, develop a lifeline for social connection, value the worth of elders

Social workers and gerontological scholars have voiced concern about:

- Loneliness (subjective perception of lack of meaningful relationships) and
- Social isolation (social engagements and contacts)
- Among older adults

(Lubben J, Gironde M, Sabbath E, Kong J, Johnson C. 2015)





Presenting Concerns

- It has been suggested that social isolation is as bad for one's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

(Holt-Lunstad et al, 2010; Hold-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris & Stephenson, 2015)

- According to James Lubben, PhD, MPH, MSW, "Social Isolation is a major health problem that has not received enough attention."





How to Further Protect Older People

- Isolation is the best way to keep elders safe, however, how do we treat the health risks that come from isolation?
- As discussed, isolation is associated with increased risk of:
 - Dementia (64 % increase)
 - Stroke (32 % increase)
 - Coronary artery disease (29% increase)
 - \$6.7 billion additional health care costs among Medicare beneficiaries

(Gary Call, MD, Journal of AHIMA, 5/11/20)





Social Distancing or Physical Distancing

- Dr. Rudolph Tanzi, Vice-Chair of Neurology at University of Massachusetts General Hospital, says:
 - “Stress related to loneliness can trigger inflammation in the body, which in turn is linked to a host of chronic conditions.”
 - “Social interaction is as important as getting enough sleep, exercising, practicing yoga, balanced diets and meditation.”
 - “We should begin to use *Physical Distancing* not *Social Distancing*.”

(Jamie Ducharme, May 8, 2020, TIME)





Mental/Physical Health Concerns during COVID-19

- Assessing social isolation and loneliness could become part of a professional protocol for:
 - Geriatric specialists (MD, NP, MSW, PHD-research, psychologists)
 - Geriatric nurses
 - Activity Staff
 - Community health care center workers
 - Medical insurance providers
 - Specialty groups such as:
 - Physical therapists
 - Neuro-muscular therapists
 - Chiropractic medical providers





Alone Scale

- To assess an individual's perception of being lonely, ask each of the items below using the following rating scale: Yes, Sometimes, No

A	Are you Attractive (as a friend) to others?	Yes_____	Sometimes_____	No_____
L	Are you Lonely?	Yes_____	Sometimes_____	No_____
O	Are you Outgoing/ Friendly?	Yes_____	Sometimes_____	No_____
N	Do you feel you have NO friends?	Yes_____	Sometimes_____	No_____
E	Are you Emotionally upset (sad)?	Yes_____	Sometimes_____	No_____

Pitkala KH, Routasalo P, Kautiainen H, Tilvis RS. Effects of psychosocial group rehabilitation on health, use of health care services, and mortality of older persons suffering from loneliness: A randomized, controlled trial. *J Gerontol* 2009;64A:792–800.





Additional Mental/Physical Impact

- Chronic loneliness and social isolation has links to an array of health problems, including:
 - Dementia
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Self-harm/domestic violence/child abuse
 - Heart conditions
 - Substance Misuse

(Jamie Ducharme, May 8, 2020, TIME)





Mental/Physical Health Impact

- Physical health, pain and disability often managed “OK” prior to COVID-19, however, when pain and chronic illness lead to functional disability, sense of identity and well-being is impacted
- Mental health conditions often have been undiagnosed, depression and severe anxiety not normal part of aging process
- Challenges in coping with uncertainty

MedPageToday, April 8, 2020 Clinical Challenge: Pain and COVID-19





Behavioral/Psych-social Methods Recommended

- Virtual/telehealth delivery format as method
 - Mindfulness Training
 - Cognitive/Behavioral Therapy
 - Meditation
 - Reminiscence
 - Body movement
 - Exercise
 - Dance
 - Yoga
 - Indoor planting
 - Pets

(Jamie Ducharme, May8, 2020, TIME)





Shared Intervention Methods

- Circle of Friends ©, a group intervention developed at Helsinki University Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP)
 - *Designed to address social isolation and loneliness*
 - *Via weekly sessions over three months*
 - *Incorporates the arts and inspiring activities*
 - *Therapeutic writing*
 - Outcomes indicated decreased loneliness, social isolation, healthcare costs and increased feeling of well-being

(The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging, 2020 Apr: 1-3) (5)





Local Programs

- **Butler Hospital, Providence, RI (401-455-6200)**
 - Day/Outpatient groups/programs
 - Addictions Therapy
 - Adult Mental Health Therapy
- **Mental Health Resources in Rhode Island | Resources to Recovery**
<https://www.rtor.org/directory/mental-health-rhode-island>
- Public **mental health** and **addiction services** in **Rhode Island** are administered and provided by The Division of **Behavioral Healthcare Services**.
 - **BH Link RI - Home | Facebook 401-414-5465**
 - <https://www.facebook.com/BHLinkRI>





5 Key Practices to Guard Heart and Mind During Crisis

1. Be good to your body

- ✓ Mind and body intimately connected: mental health integrated with physical wellness
- ✓ Make sleep a sacred priority
- ✓ Move every day
- ✓ Feed body and mind (make good food choices and decrease sugar, alcohol, caffeine, tobacco)

2. Follow a Schedule

- ✓ Sunlight
- ✓ Sleep
- ✓ Meals
- ✓ Exertion
- ✓ bathing





Key Practices

3. Be kind to your mind

- ✓ Direct attention to positive thoughts
- ✓ Practice gratitude
- ✓ Spiritual life

4. Find moments of stillness

- ✓ Release tension (stretch and shrug)
- ✓ Breathe
- ✓ Unplug (TV, phone, etc.)
- ✓ Be in nature (virtual suggestions)





Key Practices

5. Share Love

- ✓ “Be” with people you enjoy, prioritize focus on life-giving
- ✓ Forgive – look for opportunities every day to let go of others’ shortcomings
- ✓ Serve – draws out of world-shrinking preoccupation with self-struggles and liberates from self-focus, rewarding to do something to improve someone else’s life

WebMD blog Seth J. Gillihan, PhD (author of CBT Deck, Retrain Your Brain, host of Weekly Think Act Be podcast) May 8, 2020



You may be by yourself but you are not alone





Growth = Optimism

- Baking: takes time, helps one to focus, there is a sense of touch
- Dance, movement, music
- Knitting, crocheting, board puzzles, crossword puzzles, word search, reading
- Meditation, yoga, marching in place, exercise
- Embrace healthy thoughts, humor, play with pet, gardening
- Learn a new language, learn to play an instrument





Other Models

- Village Common Community of RI offers:
 - On line poetry classes
 - Virtual walking with members
 - Dance and movement class
 - Hello program for members where members call other members
 - Rhode Island Philharmonic on line
 - Metropolitan Opera streaming
 - Boston Symphony Orchestra streaming
 - Jazz (WHRB (95.3))
 - Book Club





More suggestions

- Virtual National Park Tours
 - National Park Foundation
 - <https://www.nationalparks.org>
- Museum Tours
 - 12 World Wide Museum tours
 - <https://www.travellandleisure.com>
- Free Aquarium Tours





Other issues to be considered

- Lack of IT comprehension and technological literacy, (some elders have no equipment)
- Special patient challenges/issues: hearing/vision impaired, dementia, ID/DD
- Unofficial mental health providers: volunteer opportunities from home (empathetic ear, family, memories, What Matters in their Life)
- Train lay people techniques for coping with stress, make appropriate referrals when necessary, highlight and promote volunteer efforts





Patient Engagement Communication

1. Target elderly with timely, relevant, and factual messaging (use behavior-change experts to craft messaging)
2. Prepare responses for common post-crisis questions (healthcare, food, water, other essentials)
3. Use multiple channels to increase engagement, time permitting
4. Think of crisis communications as one part of a larger engagement program





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2. The Mayo Clinic - <http://www.mayoclinic.org>, (507)284-2511 Rochester, Minnesota
3. United States Department of Health and Human Services - HHS.gov -encompass the following:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <https://www.CDC.gov> 1-800-323-4636 Atlanta, Georgia 24/7
National Institute of Health (NIH) <https://www.nih.gov> (301)496-4000 Bethesda, MD
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) <https://nimh.nih.gov> 1-866-615-6464 Bethesda, MD
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) <http://www.samhsa.gov>
1-800-662-8255 (HELP) 24/7
Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) www.hrsa.gov (301)443-3376 Rockville, MD
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) <https://www.cms.gov> 866-54-9330





- Teach elders to prioritize their own emotional wellness, they need to go slowly to decrease “failure” and not strive for perfection.

**Sharing
Is
Caring**