

Social Isolation and the Impact on Overall Health

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Introduction

In today's society, many older adults that are residing in short and long term care facilities due to chronic/acute illness or loss of physical function, face the issue of social isolation. Often times these older adults experience a lack of interactions and engagement they once had in their former communities. Social isolation is problematic because it can lead to a loss of a sense of community and by proxy possibly lead to psychological issues. Social isolation is also a problem in older adults because it has been associated with increased mortality and impairment of overall health (Steptoe A, 2013).

Conceptual Framework Sub-Issues

Community

Social isolation in older adults can lead to an estrangement with their community outside of their care facility. (Rijnaard MD, et al., 2016).

Intervention: Arranging day trips to local attractions and activities outside the care facility can help residents maintain a connection with their community and environment (Rijnaard MD, et al., 2016).

Facility Description

Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital accepts patients from outside facilities and helps them to regain strength and mobility. Patients have private rooms where the majority of them eat and spend their leisure time. Daily schedules are focused around PT/OT/ST, requiring a minimum of three hours of therapy daily. Northeast's goal is to help patients return to their previous place of residence with their maximum amount of independence.

Physical Well Being

Social isolation can negatively influence physical components to a person's health progression such as ADL function and mortality rate (Pantell M, 2013).

Intervention: Providing group therapies allow clients to work towards their personal physical goals while incorporating interactions in a supportive group format (Dickens AP, 2011).



Psychological Health

Social isolation has an impact on mental health and can lead to a greater risk of developing dementia (Dickens AP, 2011).

Intervention: Providing social evening festivities such as Bingo nights offers opportunities for social interactions. (Rijnaard MD, et al., 2016). Increasing interactions may have a decreased risk for dementia (Dickens AP, 2011).

Reflections

At Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital, residents are given schedules of daily therapies. Although group therapies are sometimes included, the lack of social activities may lead to an increased risk for social isolation. As evidence based studies show, social isolation can lead to communal, physical and psychological problems. Adding activities may lead to a decrease in social isolation and improve overall health in Northeast's patient population.