WELCOME
to the

Geriatric Mental Health in Primary Care ECHO

January-June 2025

Funding Statement

Series Learning Objectives

- Describe the role of Primary Care in assessing at least one mental health condition
- Describe the role of Primary Care in treating at least one mental health condition

Series Sessions

Date	Session Title
1/23/2025	[Social Isolation/Loneliness](#)
2/27/2025	Substance Use Disorder
3/27/2025	Depression
4/24/2025	Anxiety
5/22/2025	Cannabis/CBD and Older Adults
6/26/2025	Serious Mental Illness

Core Panel

- Brian Rosen, MD, Staff Physician, Outpatient Psychiatry, Dartmouth Health

- Courtney Stevens, PhD, Licensed Clinical Psychologist, Dartmouth Cancer Center

- Ellen Flaherty, PhD, APRN, AGSF, Vice President, Geriatric Center of Excellence, Dartmouth Health

- Lora Gerard, Program Leader, Northern New England Geriatric Education Center, Geriatric Center of Excellence, Dartmouth Health

- Meredith Kolodze, DSW, LICSW, Program Manager Specializing in Older Adults, NAMI

- Renee Pepin, PhD, Research Lead Geriatric Center of Excellence, Dartmouth Health

Social Connectedness and Aging

Renée Pepin, PhD

Connecting

- Who are you

- Where are you from

BACKGROUND: Key Definitions

- *Social isolation:* the <u>objective</u> lack of (or limited) social contact with others.

- *Loneliness:* the <u>perception</u> of social isolation or the <u>subjective</u> feeling of being lonely.

- *Social connection:* an umbrella term that encompasses the structural, functional, and quality aspects of how individuals connect to each other.

BACKGROUND: Context of Aging

- Late life can be filled with many changes. Older adults and their families may be dealing with:

  – changes in physical functioning

  – changes in body and senses

  – changes in living situation

  – changes in finances

  – changes in social circles

BACKGROUND: Social Connectedness and Mental Health

- Low social connectedness is associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes, including higher rates of mortality and cognitive decline

- Social Connectedness is strongly associated with depression and anxiety

- There is a bidirectional relationship between depression and loneliness

- Low social connectedness can lead to or exacerbate depressive and anxiety symptoms

- Depression and anxiety can lead to low social connectedness

- Common underlying factors can contribute to both mental health and social connectedness simultaneously

Social Connectedness Screening: UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale

1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
    - Hardly Ever
    - Some of the Time
    - Often

2. How often do you feel left out?
    - Hardly Ever
    - Some of the Time
    - Often

3. How often do you feel isolated from others?
    - Hardly Ever
    - Some of the Time
    - Often

Anne, 69 yo Female (UCLA = 6)

Married, strong relationship with 4 children, 8 grandchildren

Retired teacher

Very chatty and upbeat. Initially, reports she is "fine" and "always with family", with additional probing discloses that she doesn't have any friends and misses her co-workers and students. She feels a lack of purpose and doesn't know who she is anymore.

Greg, 81 yo Male (UCLA = 8)

Caregiver for wife, lives with wife, strained relationship with daughter

Retired IT manager

Reserved but tearful. Reports feeling overwhelmed, feels alone, and doesn't want to stress his wife.
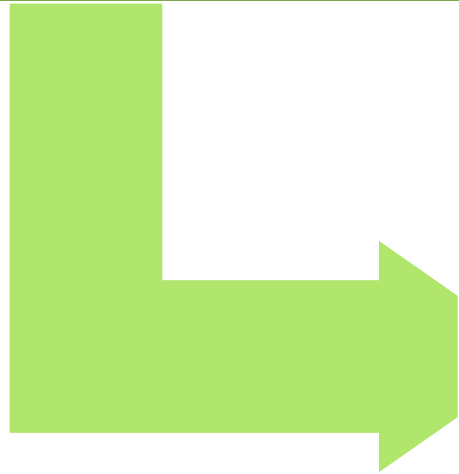
Rebecca, 73 yo Female (UCLA = 6)

Single, lives alone with cat in senior housing

Retired

Uses a wheelchair, focused on chronic medical conditions. Doesn't feel "lonely", always has been a loner and she mostly keeps to herself. Reports she is unlikely to join in with community activities.

Enhancing Social Connectedness: Intervening

- Validate the valid (emotions are always valid)
  - Affirm that feelings of loneliness are reasonable
  - Validate related feelings of sadness, emptiness, and longing
- There are things we can do to improve connectedness [be careful about how it is introduced]
  - Do not force people to be positive, look on the bright side, etc.
  - But, it is not inevitable and there are things we can do to maximize social connectedness

Enhancing Social Connectedness: Intervening

- Tailor to the individual
  - What is getting in the way of connectedness?
  - How much/what type of connection is desired?
- What aspects of social connectedness are not feasible right now?
  - How can the environment be modified to support activities?
  - How could can activities be modified so they are safe and doable?

Enhancing Social Connectedness: Intervening

- Build on resources/strengths
  - If you can solve a problem – do that
    - Address the underlying issue (e.g., hearing, transportation)
  - Leverage Technology
  - Recommend additional intervention
    - Group-based programing
    - Community-building
    - Friendly visiting
  - Recommend Clinical Care

Opinion | The Life Span of Loneliness - The New York Times

Video Presentation