



# NEWS & VIEWS

A Complimentary Newsletter from Med-Net Concepts, LLC  
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## **Coronavirus Presents a Challenge for Nursing Homes to Meet the Mental Health Needs of Residents**

**By:**  
**Louise Lindsey, Editor**

The danger of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) for the elderly and persons with underlying health issues continues to be communicated across the United States and throughout the world. Realizing that many, if not most of the residents in long-term care facilities across the country, fall into the group considered the most endangered, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued the following summary of the changes in the guidelines for long-term care facilities related to preventing the spread of COVID-19:

- Restrict all visitation except for certain compassionate care situations, such as end of life conditions
- Restrict all volunteers and non-essential healthcare personnel (HCP (e.g., barbers beauticians)
- Cancel all group activities and communal dining
- Implement active screening of residents and HCP for fever and respiratory symptoms

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html>

While implementing these steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are necessary, they present an increased danger to the mental health of the elderly due to isolation and loneliness. Studies have shown that resident loneliness in nursing homes can be especially debilitating to older adults and has been linked to serious health problems and even death.

The effect of loneliness in an elderly resident is different from the effects of depression. Loneliness is felt by residents who are fully functional, but who feel empty or isolated. Depression is related to loss of enjoyment, energy, and motivation.

Older adults often move into a nursing home due to their need to be safe; however, while expressing that they do feel safer, they often experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. One resident expressed his feelings of loneliness, dissatisfaction, and isolation when interviewed for a study by Regional Ethics Committee for Medical

Research with these words:

*"I think it's very boring and sad to live here in the nursing home. I have no one to talk to. Either the residents here don't hear, or they don't speak. Sometimes the nurses go outside and smoke. I smoke as well. When the nurses smoke, I drive my wheelchair out to them and smoke because I want someone to talk to. Here, there is nobody to talk to-it makes my day long and boring. I wish the nurses had time to talk to us."*

Even though health officials are requiring that people keep their distance from the elderly in nursing homes to protect them as a high-risk population from COVID-19, concern is being expressed by some physicians that too much isolation could be just as deadly as the virus. One University of California at San Francisco Sociology Professor warned about increased risks of depression and even suicide. She noted that elderly people, particularly those in their 80's can be mentally harmed if deprived of basic social interaction. She believes that isolating the elderly to protect their lives could result in their giving up caring about living at all.

An example of this painful concern was recently illustrated in a nursing home in New York that was locked down. The daughters of a 105-year-resident who visited frequently were no longer allowed to visit their mother and the resident was reportedly very distraught-crying out for them and calling them by name. The two daughters tried to have the facility use the same protocol to test them that it was using on its employees, but the facility could only offer other ways for families to communicate with residents.

In another similar situation, the family of one nursing home resident felt so strongly about the importance of family members being able to visit, that they opted to remove their mother from the facility and to provide care for her in one of their homes.

### **Nursing home staff working together with family and friends can make a difference, even with social distancing and preventive measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.**

In normal circumstances, outside of the COVID-19 pandemic, family and friends make a tremendous difference in alleviating the devastating loneliness that residents feel at leaving their homes and often sharing a room with a stranger. They can visit as often as possible, call and write, take residents out to lunch, to dinner, to a church service, to a movie, to visit a friend, or for a stroll in a park.

Even though family members and visitors are currently not being allowed into nursing homes except for end-of-life circumstances, many are being creative in their efforts to ensure that their loved ones and friends do not feel isolated and lonely and that the staff providing care are acknowledged and encouraged.

A facility in Kentucky has created "hallway bingo" where the numbers are called out over the facility's speaker system. Another facility in Louisiana purchased a new supply of puzzles and coloring books.

Here are some suggestions that nursing home staff and residents' family members may find useful to lift the spirits and alleviate feelings of loneliness and despair for residents who are confined but not critically ill:

For the residents:

- Provide a "Smart Phone" if the resident does not already have one, set-up "Face-Time" or "Skype," and schedule regular calls between the resident and family/friends.
- Create family videos/You-tube videos to share with residents.
- Encourage residents to watch movies and other TV programs rather than focus on news programs that may contribute to their anxiety.
- Set-up window visits for residents on the ground floor to allow family and friends to wave and acknowledge the resident.
- Family members may provide a laptop for their loved one to use for sending and receiving e-mails.
- Create art projects, such as collages, that can be done either alone or with a roommate.
- Broadcast sing-a-longs, old time radio favorites, games like bingo and trivia over the PA system.
- Provide journals and writing materials for the residents and encourage them to record their thoughts and events.

Things to do for Staff Members:

- Give out gift certificates for take-out food.
- Allow staff's families to call and speak to staff.
- Increase the number of breaks (even if they are shorter) and provide snacks and drinks in break rooms. Encourage hydration by keeping water coolers and other beverages in break rooms.
- Increase staff morale by having lighthearted contests.

To support the mental health of residents, encourage staff to provide their suggestions for dispelling boredom for their individual residents during this time of social distancing. Communication about COVID-19 requirements and reporting of changes in the health of residents is essential, but let's not neglect the communication of positive messages and sharing of ideas that enable everyone - staff and residents alike - to experience

emotional connection and satisfaction each day as we weather the storm of this pandemic together.

#### Resources:

Isolation Forced by Coronavirus Endangers Mental Health of Elderly,  
<https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2020/03/16/isolation-forced-by-coronavirus-endangers-mental-health-of-elderly/>

Loneliness in Nursing Homes,  
<https://www.skillednursingfacilities.org/resources/loneliness-in-nursing-homes/>

Nursing Home Residents Adapt to Solitude as They Brace for COVID-19,  
<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/nursing-home-residents-adapt-solitude-brace-covid-19/story?id=69645241>

Sources of Stress for Family Members of Nursing Home Residents with Advanced Dementia,  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3288670/>

The Painful Reality of Nursing Homes Being on Lockdown,  
<https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2020/03/17/the-painful-reality-of-nursing-homes-being-on-lockdown-during-coronavirus>

US Nursing Home Residents Are Trapped in Isolation Amid Coronavirus,  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/18/coronavirus-social-distancing-seniors-cards/2871335001/>

## "Don't Let Fraud Allegations Upset You ... Learn How To Avoid Them Take Med-Net Compliance's NAB Approved Courses"

Jo Ann Halberstadter, Esq

### ADMINISTRATORS TAKE NOTE

Med-Net Compliance, LLC now offers two series of fraud modules with NAB/NCERS CEs at our store on our website. Modules 1-8 offers 3 NAB CEs and modules 9-16 offer 3.75 CEs. All modules provide education on fraud, waste and abuse prevention and offer a combined total of 6.75 CEs for successful completion.

To review the NAB Approved courses visit our store:  
<https://www.mednetcompliance.com/store/>

All 16 courses on fraud, waste and abuse were developed by Betty Frandsen,  
our Vice President of Professional Development and her staff.

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