

Strategies to Combat the Rise of Behavioral Health Issues Due to Social Isolation



The spread of COVID-19 around the globe has made behavioral health a large-scale public health crisis. With a combination of new factors impacting the population – including grief, fear and loneliness amid social isolation and quarantine – distress across the nation has risen to 80%.¹

The mental health toll is not expected to subside when COVID-19 declines – instead, the negative health impacts caused by the pandemic are expected to have a long-term impact on older adults.¹ By addressing these needs upfront, facilities can avoid many of the negative long-term health implications, improve clinical and operational outcomes, and reduce care costs.

In this white paper, you will learn the effects that isolation has on behavioral health and resident health overall, and the key strategies to combat it.

Risk Factors Due to Social Isolation

One in five U.S. adults, or 47.6 million people, experience some form of mental illness each year, according to recent statistics.² In addition, heightened risk of mental health, cardiovascular, autoimmune and neurocognitive problems have been found in older adults impacted by social isolation – causing it to be a “serious public health concern” among clinical experts.³

More than 65% of SNF residents are in need of behavioral or psychiatric care⁴, yet a lack of behavioral health facilities and staff training has led to limited resources and higher care costs. Following strict levels of isolation, residents in SNF, AL/IL and outpatient facilities have experienced barriers that hinder their recovery journey as well as increase the risk of new behavioral or psychosocial issues.

Key areas that have been impacted by social isolation in SNF residents include:

- Higher levels of anxiety and depression due to the change in environment and lack of engagement. This is especially present in those with pre-existing cognitive conditions.
- Loss of mobility from confinement to rooms in order to eliminate cross-contamination of COVID-19, therefore creating new risks such as falls and urinary incontinence.

- Compounding medical issues that stem from the impacts of one initial problem, in turn, producing physical, psychosocial and nutritional deficits – generating long-lasting effects that will remain after COVID-19.

These needs become more difficult to address as the age range of residents widens. Over the last 10 years the age group of individuals residing in long-term care facilities has grown to include a younger population ranging from 31-64 years old. The wide age range of residents means staff and facilities must alter the way they provide care in order to treat the unique needs of the larger population. This includes integrating behavioral health education into a facility’s rehab program to enable staff to provide the best care for residents of all ages – helping them to remain physically and psychologically healthy.

Key Strategies to Benefit Behavioral Health in Rehabilitation

“If we don’t do something about it now, people are going to be suffering from these mental-health impacts for years to come.”

– Paul Gionfriddo, president of Mental Health America.⁵

Strategies to Combat the Rise of Behavioral Health Issues Due to Social Isolation from COVID-19

Reintroducing therapy services to residents following isolation can break down the barrier between the resident and recovery and helps eliminate the possibility of the resident generating or intensifying behavioral health issues. Key strategies include:

- Streamlining staff communication efforts relating to resident health status – keeping the entire facility updated on new precautions
- Educating staff on how to identify risks of isolation, best ways to interact with residents who might be impacted by social isolation and how to adapt care to best serve this population
- Engaging residents by utilizing innovative technology that can virtually connect them with loved ones and track their recovery progress throughout COVID-19 and beyond
- Providing ongoing assessments of resident health to determine individualized strategies of care to achieve the best possible outcomes
- Incorporating rehab therapy with the latest safety practices so the resident can maintain a level of happiness, health and improved quality of life

By implementing these strategies, facilities will be better able to identify and treat those impacted by social isolation, therefore improving facility and resident outcomes.

Resolving Behavioral Health Issues Through Partnership

In today's environment, it can be difficult to create and implement a new program tailored to the ever-increasing behavioral health needs of residents. Because of this, many facilities are opting to partner with an expert in rehabilitation and behavioral health that can strengthen the services provided by the facility and remove the burden of building the expertise and program in-house.

PORT's Hope Conquers Program

In conjunction with PORT's rehabilitation program, Hope Conquers is a comprehensive behavioral health program that trains administrative, clinical and support staff members by utilizing a five-tiered approach. This program begins with the identification and evaluation of people with behavioral health diagnoses to determine their highest functioning level for daily living with the goal of providing person-centered care that leads to each individual functioning at the highest mental, physical and psychosocial level.



Hope Conquers

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAM

Discover the benefits our Hope Conquers Program can have for your facility and residents. Contact PORT today at 757-759-8627, or visit porttherapy.com.

Sources

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