



Depression: Fast Facts: Depression Overview

Prevalence

- Approximately 300,000 (20%) of the 1.5 million older adults residing in nursing homes in the United States have symptoms of depression.
- Clinically significant depression in nursing homes ranges from 24-50%.
- The rates of new cases of depression in nursing homes are striking...
 - 13% of residents develop a new episode of major depression over a one-year period
 - 18% develop new depressive symptoms

Definition

Depression is a serious medical illness that disrupts a person's mood, behavior, thought processes and physical health. It should not be mistaken for the passing feelings of unhappiness that everyone experiences, and is not a normal consequence of age. Some of the symptoms of depression are:

1. Sleep Disturbance
2. Psychomotor retardation or agitation
3. Appetite disturbance (decreased or increased) or weight loss or gain
4. Concentration difficulties
5. Loss of energy, fatigue, tiredness
6. Depressed mood
7. Diminished or lost interest in activities
8. Guilt or feelings of worthlessness
9. Suicidal ideation or thoughts of death
10. History of depressive systems and treatment
11. Cognitive function changes
12. Recent onset or worsening of medical conditions

Seniors often exhibit different symptoms when experiencing depression and should be carefully monitored for changes in their usual habits which can signal depression. Monitoring should occur:

- At admission
- At re-admission
- At each MDS assessment
- With each change in condition

Barriers to Prevention/Treatment

The following are common barriers to adequate recognition and/or treatment of depression in the geriatric population:

- Social stigma associated with mental illness prevents acknowledging depression and seeking treatment
- Family members available as support to resident may be limited or unavailable
- Clinician, resident and family mistakenly believe that depression is a natural consequence of old age
- Confusion of symptoms with co-morbid physical conditions or medications used

- Fragmented and limited availability of mental health services in long-term care setting
- Limited reimbursement for mental health care
- Use of suboptimal treatment dosages; choice of medications restricted by formularies
- View of depression medications as “chemical restraints”

Further Reading and Web Resources

A detailed facility system assessment of depression can be obtained by contacting Primaris. Call toll-free 800-735-6776, ext. 192 and ask about the free resources on depression. Resources are also available on the web at www.primaris.org.

Mental health and aging: the challenge confronting America’s families and senior citizens. SPRY Foundation, and the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry. September 2001, Executive Summary. Available at: <http://www.spry.org/pdf/MentalHealth.pdf>

American Psychiatric Association Practice Guidelines. Treatment Works - Major Depressive Disorder, A Patient and Family Guide, 2000:1. Available at:

http://www.psych.org/psych_pract/treatg/patientfam_guide/MajorDepressive.pdf

American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association; 2000.

Goldberg, RJ. Clinical Review: managing psychosis-related behavioral problems in the elderly. 1997; Available at: <http://www.ascp.com/public/pubs/tcpsupp/1997/suppc/review1.html>

Salzman C. Practical considerations for the treatment of depression in elderly and very elderly long-term care patient. *Am J Clin Psychiatry*. 1999;60(Suppl 20):30-3.

National Institutes of Health (NIMH) Consensus Development Panel on Depression in Late Life. Diagnosis and treatment of depression in late life. *JAMA*. 1992;268:1018-1024.

Heston LL, Garrard J, Makris L, et al. Inadequate treatment of depressed NH elderly. *J AM Geriatr Society*. 1992;40:1117-1122.

American Medical Director’s Association. Depression Clinical Practice Guideline. Columbia, MD: AMDA 1996 (Revision 2003) - Purchase information: <http://www.amda.com/info/cpg/depression.htm>

More depression resources available at: <http://www.psychologynet.org/major.html>