

Session 14: Managing Social Isolation of Residents, Care Partners and Staff during COVID-19

Key Takeaways:

- **Social isolation often results from being physically distant from other people, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited ability to visit or communicate with friends or family can make this feel even worse.**
- **People may be around others yet may feel socially isolated due to wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) and reduced group activities and dining programs.**
- **Feeling lonely or alone is different than being socially isolated; people may feel lonely even when they are around others, and not everyone who is socially isolated feels lonely.**
- **In addition to residents, care partners in the community are often isolated or alone due to the pandemic and a fear of contracting COVID-19 through interactions with others during shopping, running errands or other activities.**
- **Nursing home staff members may also be feeling socially isolated since they are not permitted to eat or take breaks with one another without wearing masks or PPE and must keep at least six feet apart. Staff must observe COVID-19 prevention protocols when outside of work as well.**

The following question set can be used to facilitate discussions and reveal opportunities across and within key members of interprofessional teams, residents and care partners. Please consider using/adapting them in your next huddles or team meetings.

Resources and Questions by Content

How do we talk about, reduce and minimize social isolation?	Does the nursing home provide written resources on what social isolation is, how to recognize it in residents or team members, and how to discuss ways to reduce or minimize it in the nursing home setting? Are all team members able to access resources on all days/shifts? Do team meetings (for example, daily huddles or morning meetings) specifically address the topic of social isolation across departments (not just with the clinical team)? https://milkeninstitute.org/reports/together-apart www.nationalacademies.org/isolationandloneliness
Document and Report discussions on social isolation	Is social isolation discussed during care plan meetings and ad hoc if a particular situation suggests that it is impacting a resident's health? Who monitors resident records to determine if issues and interventions related to social isolation are clearly documented? How is that information communicated to leadership and all relevant members of the healthcare team?
Follow-Up Plan (monitoring over time)	If a team member notices that a colleague may be experiencing social isolation, how is that information communicated and to whom? Does someone in leadership follow up after the intervention/s to determine if the social isolation is reduced?
Improvement Concepts/Critical Questions for Leadership	Are there regular (daily or every other day) huddles or calls during which the team discusses social isolation in individual residents? Are specific interventions to reduce social isolation within the nursing home discussed and documented?
Key Concepts by Stakeholder Group	
What do Medical Directors Need to know and discuss with the team?	Medical directors must be able to recognize and discuss social isolation as a social determinant of health, for residents, care partners and staff members. Medical directors play a role, along with the DON and Administrator, in making decisions about whether or not to limit visitation from members of the community, whether or not to restrict communal dining and/or therapeutic recreation/activities.
What do DONs and nursing supervisors need to know?	DONs must have a system for assessing and monitoring staff for social isolation, including asking about the impact of reduced communication, social distancing, limited activities outside of work, inability to give hugs or touch others.
What does the interprofessional team need to know?	Is there one person designated as the 'lead' or champion to address social isolation among residents, care partners, and staff? Is there written information/guidance on programs/services to reduce social isolation? Are interventions to address social isolation included (when appropriate) in each resident's care plan? Is information from CNAs included in how to reduce social isolation? Team members must consistently and reliably demonstrate that they document and report any ideas or concerns related to social isolation to their supervisor or leadership in a timely manner. Anyone on the team may propose activities or interventions to prevent, reduce and minimize social isolation and is encouraged to share those with the team.