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“Face in the crowd” loneliness and isolation in the elderly, impact and prevention

Alison Burton Shepherd

Care Quality Commission Specialist Advisor, UK

Loneliness and social isolation are two subjective complex terms with no standardized definition within the literature. Whilst loneliness can affect both young and old, older people are considered to be more vulnerable to both loneliness and isolation particularly after; suffering personal loss of friends and family, reduced mobility, or limited income (Burton-Shepherd 2015). In 2010 A meta-analysis from Holt-Lunstad et al identified that the effects of loneliness and isolation may exceed the mortality rates from disease such as obesity and may also equate to mortality rates seen from smoking 15 cigarettes per day. Furthermore Cacioppo (2014) argues that the effect of loneliness on physical health carries twice the health risks of obesity alone. However a poll of UK GP's suggested that 36% of doctors did not believe that loneliness made a significant contribution to early mortality (Age UK 2011). This is somewhat controversial and therefore the aim of this presentation is to highlight the importance of loneliness in the elderly and provide practical suggestions as to how nurses may intervene.

Biography

Alison Burton Shepherd works as a Nurse Practitioner/Non-Medical Prescriber for an Independent Walk in Centre. She is also a Specialist Advisor (nursing) for the Care Quality Commission. She is also a Qualified Nurse Teacher and a Teaching Fellow for the Higher Education Academy. As a Registered Nutritionist, she also has an interest in obesity and malnutrition management.

alison.burtonshepherd@gmail.com

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