# COVID-19 Concerns

As the United States struggles to contain COVID-19, concerns are growing regarding its long term impact on mental health and those individuals in long-term/assisted living care facilities. There have also been spikes in substance abuse including alcohol because of job losses and isolation, as well as spikes in domestic violence and suicide, especially among former substance abusers and those with anxiety and depression. A number of factors are driving these increases. The impact of the pandemic on social determinants of health, such as employment, income levels, and housing and food security have threatened basic survival. Access to care has also been negatively affected. Many individuals are finding themselves living with a perpetual sense of uncertainty, which is associated with negative psychological well-being.

When the pandemic hit, long-term care and assisted living facilities across the country shut their doors to visitors, kept residents in their rooms and suspended most group activities and communal meals to protect residents from Covid-19. The confinement that was meant to protect our most vulnerable was/is threatening their lives. The isolation is accelerating the aging process, increasing falls, is causing decreases in strength and the ability to ambulated, and is contributing to weight loss. There is also an acceleration of dementia because there is no rhythm to their day. Confinement, social isolation, and the lack of external stimulation are fueling cognitive decline and depression, which in turn, increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. In many respects, the side effects are worse than the potential harm of a slightly higher risk of infection. The quality of life of these residents diminishes to such a point that there isn't any. While trying to protect our most vulnerable, we need to balance that with the need to stay connected.

It is likely that the mental health fallout from the pandemic will continue to grow. The exacerbation of social determinants of health will last for years, and likely decades, which will have long-term implications for mental health. Of particular importance is the role of technology, which has emerged as an important factor for maintaining social connection, as well as, accessing mental health services. We, as individuals, can provide social support through phone calls and video chats to help others feel socially connected, less lonely, or isolated. The changes that can happen because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ways we try to contain the spread of the virus affect everyone.

Thank you,

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