

## **Implementing Mental Wellness for the Geriatric Population**

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## Introduction

Mental health describes the wellbeing of an individual that enables one to manage life's typical stresses and perform and function productively (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020). Mental health has many layers to it as it develops over one's lifespan and can change based on, "mental health literacy, attitude towards mental disorders, self-perceptions and values, cognitive skills, academic/ occupational performance, emotions, behaviors, self-management strategies, social skills, family and significant relationships, physical health, sexual health, meaning of life, and quality of life," (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020). Good mental health is essential to each individual as it affects everyone.

There are three main components that create our health: mental health, physical health, and emotional health. If one of these is offset, it can affect the other components. For example, if one has poor physical health, they are at a greater chance of developing a mental health problem. Good mental health matters because it prevents poor mental health and the development or worsening conditions of mental disorders. Life is all about balancing the three main components that creates one's well being at each stage of their life. It is easy to fall off balance and deteriorate. Achieving and maintaining mental wellness is no easy task, one needs guidance, assistance, community, motivation, and strong coping strategies (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020).

Mental health is essential to all age groups, especially geriatric patients as it is a growing population with under researched and overlooked mental illnesses. This leaves a lack of knowledge about how to properly intervene and promote mental wellness. The World Health Organization, defines mental health as, "A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (World Health

Organization, 2004). The geriatric patient has a disadvantage of recovering from mental illness as there are not as many resources out there designated for their age group and they face numerous changes in their lives; decreased physical ability, loss of loved ones, decline in mental health, and reduced quality of life. All of these shifts contribute to alterations in social functioning, cognition, and physiology (Biering, 2019). By immersing the geriatric population that are homed in assisted living in exercises and interventions to help bring the individual closer to mental wellness, they can have a higher chance of a positive mental care outcome. It is important to note that these last three years have socially isolated our society, this affected the geriatric population harshly. There needs to be long-term efficient psychotherapeutic interventions implemented into care for the geriatric population. Recovering from mental illness should exemplify the, “Development of new meaning and purpose in one’s life as one grows beyond the age-related stressors that lead to mental health suffering, such as losses, loneliness and decreased functional abilities,” (Biering, 2019). This paper will focus on promoting mental wellness in life care communities for the geriatric population and will improve social functioning, cognition, and psychology to further contribute to an enhanced quality of life and better overall health.

### **Assisted Living: The Current Approach and The Future Approach**

The world is living through a Coronavirus pandemic that began in 2020. The Coronavirus targets the older populations and affects them heavily. This leads to harsh social isolation rules, although the rules are easing up, they are still in place. Due to government recommendations, restrictions, and social distancing, the older generation was impacted by the feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Latikka et al., 2021). Loneliness can be defined as, “perceived

social isolation or a subjective unpleasant and distressing feeling that results from a significant discrepancy or mismatch between one's actual and desired social relationships," (Latikka et al., 2021). Over 40% of older adults claim that they are lonely in the United States (Latikka et al., 2021), rising as COVID-19 has had a heavy impact on this generation. Loneliness and social isolation are risk factors of, "Mortality and they are associated with poor physical and mental health," (Latikka et al., 2021). Older adults in assisted living face the harsh repercussions of the rules and regulations that are associated with COVID-19.

Isolation and loneliness is not a solution to solving the geriatric population's mental unwellness. It is time for a change. Oftentimes, when an older adult needs good mental promotion, it is not provided for them. There needs to be interventions put into place that can help foster mental wellness and sustain it. These interventions can be grouped into leisure and skill development such as exercise and pain programs, gardening, listening to music (Quan et al., 2020), psychological therapy that includes nostalgic, humorous and existential types (Quan et al., 2020), and animal support. It is essential to provide these services to all long-term facilities as the patients need these interventions to help reduce loneliness and other aging complications or distress that they may face.

Older adults face chronic health conditions, a need for assistance, and a decreased ability or want to participate in daily activities (Quan et al., 2020). Currently, there are no rules and regulations that require mental health awareness seminars and effective interventions to be present for long-term care facilities. It is vital to provide screening, prevention, and teaching techniques to help lower the incidence of mental illness and provide a better life for those who are in need.

There are many solutions to preventing, screening, and treating mental disorders. To begin, it is ideal to prevent mental disorders, to stop an issue before it begins. There are some solutions that would assist with prevention. This would be to encourage patients to talk about their feelings, encourage adequate rest, provide nutritious meals, provide practices that encourage mindfulness, encourage support systems, and give back to the community. Although vague, they can be adjusted and suited to pertain to each individual to fit their needs. It is important to create and implement interventions that promote mental wellness and decrease mental illness.

### **Purpose of Interventions**

Interventions are actions that are implemented to improve a particular problem. Interventions need to be tested, experimented, and provide efficient results before they are considered to be implemented in the specific setting. It is important that an intervention is clarified for the setting, the age group, the situation, and the effect that it will cause. Interventions can be helpful in assisted-living as they provide an activity for the older adult to participate in, depending on the situation.

Interventions are beneficial because they will help to prevent and decrease mental disorders and help to promote mental wellness. They benefit the patient in unique ways through improving social functioning, cognition, and psychology to further contribute to an enhanced quality of life and better overall health.

Interventions are useful because they are non-invasive and they are not performed if the risks outweigh the benefits. They can be easily implemented into many settings and are constantly being tested, this allows for new evidence-based interventions to be implemented based on the needs and the goals of the patient.

Interventions come in different variations with a different approach, group size, time per session, time for results, and are overall all mixed in methods. This allows for certain interventions to be more beneficial to certain age groups, conditions, and settings. Interventions can be shaped and formed to fit different settings and needs, which is exactly what the older generation needs.

### **Interventions Specific to Older Population in Long-Term Living Accommodations**

This section will be focusing on three non-pharmacological interventions that are highly effective for geriatric patients and can be implemented into assisted-living facilities. These interventions were chosen based on the method, efficacy, and possible setbacks.

#### **Movement Therapy: Mind-in-Motion**

Movement therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach that promotes physical and emotional change through movement (Salmons et al., 2022). This intervention is recommended to reduce psychological distress through establishing peer support and developing healthy responses to life's daily stressors (Salmons et al., 2022). Mind-in-Motion helps to establish, "Healthy responses to stress and increasing understanding of how trauma and disease can interrupt access to sensation and emotion," (Salmons et al., 2022). It incorporates dance, stretching, posture and balance exercises to support movement theory, it uses the physical body and the mind and combines them as one, allowing patients to, "Express themselves through physical movements and creative exercises," (Salmons et al., 2022). These movements become a 'language' for participants and allows them to express themselves in ways that words may not be able to. Following the movement portion, the participants will have a discussion on the therapy and share

their experience. This can help to reduce the mental health challenges that the geriatric population faces.

The effectiveness is measured through participants satisfaction through utilizing self-satisfaction surveys and goals setting measures. The participants were provided entry surveys and asked to identify three goals that are personal to them. They were also given exit surveys. The study measures the impact of, “Subjective health and well-being, such as anxiety, depression, sleep, personality, self-esteem and quality of life,” (Salmons et al., 2022). Overall, the participants showed that they had a positive experience and achieved their goals at the end of the four sessions.

Movement therapy: Mind-in-Motion was originally performed in a retirement home, therefore, the setting is similar to a long-term care facility and can be adapted as needed. The experiment took place one time a week for one hour for four weeks. It was done in small groups. A therapist who was licensed as a clinical social worker and had additional certifications in dance and movement ran the program. It is important that each participant creates at least three goals they would like to accomplish before the end of this therapy. This program focused on using, “methods of mindfulness, guided imagery, body scanning and constructive rest; guided, therapeutic movement; and reflection through group process,” (Salmons et al., 2022). Each session followed the format of guided imagery and warm up, then an active movement and emotional release. Guidance “free dance” followed that focused on partners and collaborating as a group. At the end, the group shared their experience. It is important that each session has a theme that tailors to the participants needs. In the study, week one’s theme was body story. This week focused on how trauma can change, “Their access to emotion, and were taught to think, feel, and respond to stress,” (Salmons et al., 2022). Week two, “Focused on a sense of being

grounded and emotions of grief, attachment, hope, and drive were explored. Participants worked on their hip-knee-foot alignment, hip-socket freedom, and deep body memory while learning the building blocks of posture and balance,” (Salmons et al., 2022). Week three was able purpose, ambition, desire, faith, etc., and week four was about the freedom and movement of the upper body, “Participants were taught to use “heart— hands” to connect with self and others to express feelings of love, beauty, desire, and creativity,” (Salmons et al., 2022). These themes help unlock part of the mind and body connection that may have been absent or lacking. It is important to have a structured session with a theme to release the full potential of the participants.

There are possible setbacks to this intervention that can decrease efficacy overall. The study could have included more sessions with an expanded group size and a control group. Also, there is a stigma that surrounds mental illness. Some of the community may not want to participate because of the older generations' relationship with mental disorders.

### **Animal-Assisted-Therapy (AAT)**

Animal-Assisted-Therapy is an intervention created to assist older adults with coping in relation to loneliness and depression. Research, “Has shown that human–animal interactions (HAIs) are associated with therapeutic benefits for older adults, along with positive social and economic benefits,” (Krause-Parello et al., 2019). Animal companionship has been shown to, “Increase physical activity, enhance social support, and improve cardiovascular health,” (Krause-Parello et al., 2019). These companion animals can help provide older patients with a, “Sense of purpose, reason to live, and sense of wellbeing, with healthier, happier, and even longer lives,” (Krause-Parello et al., 2019). Animal-Assisted-Therapy is a goal oriented intervention that provides visitation to homes by an animal handler. Animal-Assisted-Therapy can be adjusted to



robotic animals if there are allergies, restrictions, or goes against any possible ethics. This allows for an alternative animal to come and visit while providing the same benefits. The intervention includes certified pet handlers to bring animals into the long-term care facilities for an allotted time and allows the patient to interact with the animal, as well as, “Hold, stroke, groom, walk, talk to, and play,” (Krause-Parello et al., 2019). The goal is to bring the same animal to build a bond with and ultimately decrease the loneliness that residents face in long-term care facilities. If the older adult is capable of mobility, they can increase physical activity through dog walking. This intervention is cost-effective and helps to bring older adults together with shelter animals who can use the extra love.

Animal-Assisted-Therapy is a very effective intervention as several studies have provided strong support and high efficacy. Participants were from many locations, such as nursing home residents, residents from long-term care facilities, and independent living housing in communities for older adults (Krause-Parello et al., 2019). The study methods that took place varied from, “Descriptive, cohort, cross-sectional survey, longitudinal, and randomized controlled trial,” (Krause-Parello et al., 2019). The effectiveness range varies per study and measures, but the most common effectiveness is shown in six months. AAT is helpful in reducing older adults, “Feelings of loneliness and depression,” (Krause-Parello et al., 2019) and increasing physical activity.

Animal-Assisted-Therapy can be adapted to work effectively in a long-term housing setting easily as that is where many of the studies were performed along with other older adult living facilities. Typically, the therapy intervention consists of a six month program with three visits a week that last for 90 minutes. If the facility does not allow animals due to rules or allergies, a robotic animal will be used to supplement as they can achieve similar effectiveness.

Possible setbacks that could be in correlation with AAT can be adjusted. It is nearly impossible to create an AAT experiment with a randomized controlled trial because it is hard to blind participants to the possible active treatment or control group (Krause-Parello et al., 2019). It is important to also further research how to seamlessly connect the older population with a therapeutic animal. It is also important that researchers create a standard set of measures and hold further research to those sets of measures to effectively compare and gather data (Krause-Parello et al., 2019).

### **Music Therapy**

Music therapy is beneficial to mental health and wellbeing as research has been shown to prove that there are neurochemical changes in the body that help to regulate emotions, increase motivation, and pleasure. There are organized and interactive forms of musical engagement that goes beyond purely listening to music. The assisted care home can allow groups of participants to come together and create music, this helps to create a sense of community, social connection, and help support mental wellness (Clements-Cortes & Pascoe, 2020). By establishing a group that comes together and forms their mindsets together to create the product of music, this can cause a beneficial outcome of increasing mood, self-esteem, and self-awareness (Clements-Cortes & Pascoe, 2020). The group aspect inspires social bonding, positive emotions, and decreased stress levels (Clements-Cortes & Pascoe, 2020). By holding musical therapy sessions, mental wellness can improve and provide an improved quality of life (Clements-Cortes & Pascoe, 2020). One can transform the music therapy sessions to fit the needs of the participants, this can be, “music listening, community music, and music therapy,” (Clements-Cortes & Pascoe, 2020).

Music therapy is low-cost, adaptable, and effective. It can take place at any time of the day and in many settings. There needs to be instruments or a type of speaker to make or listen to music. Music is a beneficial therapy that does not have a session limit, it can be used at all times for unlimited time.

Music therapy has been shown to be effective in long-term care facilities as they are trying to respond to the impact that COVID-19 has taken on the older population. Music therapy is designed to help mental health through music therapy (Clements-Cortes & Pascoe, 2020).

### **Importance of Continuing Interventions**

Mental Wellness interventions are vital for older adults as the aging population faces many challenges and lacks support, face environmental, occupational, and financial challenges, and may lose physical, emotional, and social qualities (Zechner et al., 2019). To add, there are increased health and mortality risks that can impact the older individual heavily. There has been a lack of evidence-based research to improve the geriatric population's quality of life and wellbeing. It is time to be proactive and increase research that can be implemented to improve the lives of geriatric patients.

Based on the interventions mentioned in this piece: Movement Therapy: Mind-in-Motion, Animal-Assisted-Therapy (AAT), and Music Therapy can be continued in long term care facilities as they are cost-effective, can be tailored to unique patients, and encourage mental wellness. They can be continued for years as movement therapy needs an instructor, AAT requires shelter animals, and music therapy needs instruments or speakers.

It is important to offer numerous resources and mental health care programs that geriatric patients can participate in. The three interventions mentioned in this paper are not the only

interventions available to geriatric patients. There are other interventions that can be offered and tailored to older patients. There can be more mental illness specific interventions such as psychosocial intervention focusing on cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), cognitive rehabilitation, and reminiscence therapy (Tonga et al., 2020). These interventions are more limited on the type of patient to receive them as it is a patient with depressive symptoms and mild cognitive impairment. Although limited, they are still essential to offer to those who need them.

### **Further Research Recommendation**

Improving wellness for older adults needs interventions that are based on physical health, social skills, emotional wellbeing, spirituality, intellectual wellness, quality of life, personal strengths, and community functioning (Zechner et al., 2019). Interventions that include all of these factors have not yet been created and adapted. There is a demand to create and explore such programs and interventions.

### **Barriers**

The older adult population faces many barriers when it comes to getting mental health help. Older adults in the United States receive, “Lower rates of mental health care utilization than younger adults,” (Lavingia et al., 2020). There are numerous barriers when it comes to receiving mental help, such as, “attitudes and knowledge among older adults; comorbid medical conditions; provider-related factors; other extrinsic barriers (eg, cost, transportation, reliance on caregivers); and unique factors that affect older adults in minority populations,” (Lavingia et al., 2020). On top of these barriers, there are cultural barriers and stigmas (Lavingia et al., 2020). Interventions are a necessity as they increase the access to mental health services (Lavingia et al.,

2020). Interventions are being created and continue to need to be created to effectively target barriers.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this paper is to focus on promoting mental wellness in life care communities for geriatric patients to improve social functioning, cognition, and psychology to further contribute to an enhanced quality of life and better overall health through intervention strategies. Interventions are needed for the prevention and decrease of mental disorders and an increase in mental wellness. The number of older adults with mental disorders, “is projected to rise and traditional therapies are costly, carry stigma, and lack efficacy for all patients,” (Salmons et al., 2022). To reiterate, mental health describes the wellbeing of an individual that enables one to manage life's typical stresses and perform and function productively (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020). Mental health is affected especially in the older generation as they face numerous changes in their lives; decreased physical ability, loss of loved ones, decline in mental health, and reduced quality of life. All of these shifts contribute to alterations in social functioning, cognition, and physiology (Biering, 2019).

Good mental health matters because it prevents poor mental health and the development or worsening conditions of mental disorders. Achieving and maintaining mental wellness is no easy task, one needs guidance, assistance, community, motivation, and strong coping strategies (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020). Interventions are a good start at promoting and maintaining mental wellness as they are designed to specifically incorporate factors of physical health, social skills, emotional wellbeing, spirituality, intellectual wellness, quality of life, personal strengths, and community functioning (Zechner et al., 2019).

It is essential to include those that are housed in assisted living in exercises and interventions to help bring the individual closer to mental wellness, they can have a higher chance of a positive mental care outcome. The three interventions stated were Movement Therapy: Mind-in-Motion, Animal-Assisted-Therapy (AAT), and Music Therapy. Movement therapy connects the body to the mind. Animal assisted therapy uses animals as a support, comfort and encourages physical activity. Music therapy helps create a sense of community, creativity, and emotional wellbeing. All three of these interventions can be easily adaptable to long-term care facilities and promote mental wellness.

Interventions that were mentioned in this paper are important but they are not the end game. There needs to be a continuation of research, a standardization of factors, and an attempt to break down barriers.

Mental wellness is important to upkeep and promote at all age groups, however, the older generation is in the most need due to lack of research, increased barriers, and increase in mental illness cases.

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