The Effects of Loneliness on Seniors

Presented by: Joy Siegel, Ed.D, MBA
“It is strange to be known so universally and yet to be so lonely.”

Albert Einstein quotes
- A stand alone feeling that occurs when an individual feels personal and social needs are not being met
- It is not about being alone
- For seniors it often felt after a situational life experience
- When a person feels lonely, they are not always depressed

What is Loneliness?
Problems of Loneliness

- Can directly impact quality of life
- Poor relationships
- Impaired physical and mental health
- Increased mortality
- Low self-esteem
• Feeling lonely for an extended time can have the same effect on the body as smoking 10 cigarettes a day. (University of Chicago, 2011)
Causes of Loneliness – Situational Life Experiences

- Personal illness
- Changing bodies due to aging, potential decline in abilities
- Illness and loved ones, loved ones change
- Loss of pet
Causes of Loneliness – Situational Life Experiences

- Disconnected or overbearing children
- Financial woes
- Housing transitions
- Feeling as if they are losing control as children take over
Causes of Loneliness – Situational Life Experiences

- Inability to perform regular activities
- Need extra support for everyday living, but are afraid to ask
- Loss of friends
- Feeling of powerlessness
- Loss of appetite
The concept of loneliness is one not easily presented by seniors.

The concept of loneliness is often mistreated as depression.

A lonely senior may find it manifests in physical discomfort.
Loneliness – the “L” word

- Untreated, long-term loneliness can be a precursor to heart disease, stroke, and cancer. According to Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch (2010)
• How often do you get out of your house?

• Do you feel sad? How you experienced any changes in your life?

• Do you enjoy your days, your friends?

• What is your relationship like with your family?
Questions to Identify Loneliness

- How is the quality of your relationships?
- Do you find yourself isolated?
- Are there things you’d like to say, but you don’t?
- Do you have worries?
Questions to Identify Loneliness

- Did you ever think that you would be chosen to have so many years of experience and wisdom?
• Over 10% of the population over age 65 feels chronic loneliness

• Almost 50% of seniors at a senior center felt lonely some of the time

• If loneliness is identified it can be addressed

Loneliness Facts
Addressing Loneliness

- Identify situational life experiences
- Work with social service agencies to assist in helping the senior
- Recommend social activities, via public centers or religious affiliation
- Prescribe visit to case manager and/or therapist
Addressing Loneliness

- Addressing loneliness can reduce illness
- Identifying resources for patients can result in wellness
- Without minimizing reason for loneliness, focus on resiliency
- Don’t confuse loneliness with isolation or depression, identify life situations
