

Stabilizing certified nursing assistant (CNA) employment is necessary for maintaining care networks and providing high quality of care for nursing home (NH) residents. This study's objective was to examine the relationship of high wages and empowerment practices on CNA retention. We used the 2015 Ohio Biennial Survey to construct a facility-level dataset of 547 NHs and estimated multivariable linear regressions. NHs that provided both high wages and high empowerment were associated with a 12.95 percentage-point improvement in the CNA retention rate (SE = 4.53, t-value = 2.86,  $p = 0.0045$ ). High wages and a high empowerment score did not have significant effects individually ( $p > .05$ ). Retention rates were similar between NHs that lacked high wages and scored low on the empowerment scale, and NHs that provided one at a high level but not the other. Implications for better retaining CNAs require multiple empowerment practices combined with high hourly wages.

#### AGING ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM: AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Social isolation is associated with poor health and well-being in older adults. Little is known about isolation in persons aging on the Autism Spectrum (AS), a group with varied physical and mental health comorbidities. The purpose of this study was to explore social networks of adults aging on the AS. We conducted in-depth interviews ( $N=30$ ) with adults on the AS (age 50+) and analyzed findings using a constant comparative method. Findings suggest that older adults on the AS struggle to build and maintain social networks over the life course, in large part, because of challenges with communication and trust. Implications of isolation include challenges with community supports and employment. We propose several social convoy models and intervention mechanisms to support this population--as their social networks narrow over time, and they face aging-related challenges without the buffer of strong social relations.

#### MULTIDISCIPLINARY EMERGING PERSPECTIVES ON BUILDING AND MAINTAINING NETWORKS IN AGING

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This presentation is a reflective piece on developing and staging of the inaugural Gerontology Student Workforce Day at the Georgia Capitol held in January 2016 through coordination with the state-level Council on Aging (GCOA: Georgia-Council-on-Aging). The aims of this initiative focused on bridging students' gerontology education and career aims with current legislative concerns for older adults at the state level through networking and advocacy efforts. We also sought out to highlight to state legislators the necessity to support gerontology education. Results of

this networking engagement included educating state legislators on both the role of gerontology education to support the needs of older residents at the community-level and highlighting to both parties the impact of gerontology professionals on the state's workforce. As a result, we engaged gerontology students and early career aging professionals in high-impact networking opportunities focused on service and policy efforts with state legislators and local AAAs (area-agencies-on-aging).

#### SESSION 2535 (SYMPOSIUM)

##### INTEREST GROUP SESSION—AGING VETERANS: EFFECTS OF MILITARY SERVICE ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE: OPTIMIZING VETERAN AND CAREGIVER WELL-BEING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Chair: Christine E. Gould, *VA Palo Alto Health Care System, Palo Alto, United States*

Co-Chair: Julia Loup, *University of Alabama, Department of Psychology, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States*

Discussant: Laura O. Wray, *VA Center for Integrated Healthcare, Buffalo NY, United States*

Older Veterans account for more than half of Veterans receiving care through the VA. Many suffer from dementia, traumatic brain injuries, and mental health disorders, resulting in complex care needs, which may include need for caregiver support. Innovative approaches using technology have the potential to improve access to treatments that improve the well-being of older Veterans and their caregivers. This symposium will present data from three Veterans Health Administrative investigators who are examining the impacts of innovative technology-delivered interventions. First, Dr. Michelle Hilgeman will describe preliminary 6-month outcome findings from a telephone-delivered Care Consultation + Counseling (CC+C) intervention for Veterans with dementia and their caregivers. Second, Dr. Kaci Fairchild will detail the background, methodology, and preliminary results of The COACH Project (Combined Online Assistance for Caregiver Health). The COACH Project is a mobile-delivered intervention consisting of exercise and caregiver skills training designed to reduce caregiver burden in those caring for someone with cognitive impairment. Third, Dr. Christine Gould will describe the development and feasibility of the Geri-Mobile Health clinic, which helps older Veterans use VA mental health apps to meet their well-being and mental health goals. Dr. Gould will describe the clinic's personalized coaching method to support Veterans unfamiliar with apps and will share findings regarding the program's acceptance, feasibility, and preliminary outcomes. Dr. Laura Wray, the executive director of the VA Center for Integrated Healthcare, will serve as the discussant. She will comment on implementing these interventions in primary care settings and the potential barriers to their adoption.

##### GERI-MOBILE HEALTH: DEVELOPMENT AND FEASIBILITY OF A PROGRAM TO HELP OLDER VETERANS USE VA MENTAL HEALTH MOBILE APPS

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