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Department of Physical Therapy and
Human Movement Sciences
Northwestern University
Feinberg School of Medicine
Chicago, IL

Rachel Lessem, JD, PhD
Leonard Schanfield Research Institute
CJE SeniorLife
Chicago, IL

Jason R. Falvey, DPT, PhD, GCS
Division of Geriatrics
Department of Internal Medicine
Yale School of Medicine
New Haven, CT

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COVID-19 Impact in Community Care—A Perspective on Older Persons With Dementia in Singapore



To the Editor:

The health and care of our vulnerable older persons with dementia (PWDs) have been inadvertently compromised by general measures taken to protect our community. On April 3, 2020, the Singapore government enforced social distancing measures and compulsory mask-wearing.¹ The Silver Generation Office reinforced these measures to cognitively impaired older people with home visits.² An ongoing initiative, “Support for Persons Living With Dementia Over the COVID-19 Period (SPOC-19),” organized by the Alzheimer’s Disease Association (ADA) and the Agency for Integrated Care, provides memos to appeal for waiver of monetary fines for PWDs who breach safe distancing rules.^{3,4}

Physical rehabilitation and dementia care centers have suspended operations temporarily.⁵ The burden of caregiving, having fallen squarely on families of PWDs, invariably increases caregiver stress.⁶ These center closures have also led to their physical and cognitive deconditioning.^{6,7} New online alternatives are made available to replace center-based exercise and dementia-care programs. These include exercise programs by the Singapore Health Promotion Board and SportsSG as well as dementia-care programs by ADA such as (1) “Stay Home Fun With ADA” comprising of karaoke, bingo, and cooking; (2) “Journey with the Arts and Dementia (JADE),” a reminiscence-based program; and (3) “ADA Memories Café,” a virtual sing-along session.⁸

Lack of access to technology, digital illiteracy, and sensory impairment, however, limit the use of online resources.⁶ Additional assistance is needed to set up digital devices and troubleshoot connectivity problems. This is challenging for households that are struggling with caregiving duties in addition to working-from-home and looking after young children.

Recognizing the above limitations, we can consider engaging mass media channels for our digitally challenged older persons with (1) dedicated television and radio channels to screen

exercise and cognitive-stimulating programs and having (2) short exercise routines as filler television programs to periodically remind them to exercise. For comprehensive personalized care, we propose having (1) a dedicated resource helpline to help PWDs and their caregivers navigate the myriad of new resources and initiatives, and (2) where resources are available, for all PWDs to be recruited into a registry for tailored case management.

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Nydia C. Rais, MMBS
Lydia Au, MMBS
Melanie Tan, MMBS

Division of Geriatric Medicine, Department of Medicine, Ng Teng Fong Hospital, National University Health System, Singapore

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What Have We Learned About Nursing From the Coronavirus Pandemic?



To the Editor:

During the current coronavirus pandemic, the focus of the accolades has gone to nurses working in the acute care sector, where “real nursing” occurs as portrayed in television or in the movies. Over the past few months there has, however, been some increased recognition of the critically important role that nurses play in long-term care. Nursing home nurses are present 24 hours a day, providing care and serving as the eyes and ears of all other providers who intermittently evaluate residents in these settings. During the coronavirus pandemic quarantine, they provide enhanced care, as families are not able to visit. They also facilitate telecommunication with physicians, hospital staff, and families and friends of residents. This care is consistent with the role of nurses over time, which ranges from preventing illness and promoting health to caring for the sick and comforting the dying.