

Researchers find phone assessment effective for evaluating cognition in the elderly

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Cognitive testing by telephone in elderly individuals is generally as effective as in-person testing, according to a new study by Effie M. Mitsis, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Mount Sinai School of Medicine and part of Mount Sinai's Alzheimer's Disease Research Center. The study will appear in the *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*.

The study is the first to evaluate the effectiveness of telephone assessment in an elderly cohort using well established neuropsychological tests. Fifty-four healthy women with an average age of 79 were divided into two groups and subjected to a series of standard neuropsychological tests, including mental status questions such as identifying the day and time, remembering a series of words or numbers and naming tasks. These tests are sensitive to cognitive decline and are typically used in clinical trials of Alzheimer's Disease to monitor progression or stabilization of memory and thinking ability in elderly individuals. Both groups received in-person assessment of cognition as well as assessment by telephone.

The results indicated that the telephone and in-person assessment were comparable, suggesting that telephone assessment may be a useful, cost-effective and time efficient alternative to in-person assessment of cognition in the elderly.

Cognitive assessment is the most effective method for early detection of dementia but it is not available in all communities. Telephone assessment

could provide the opportunity to offer an evaluation to a wider range of people, including those who live in rural areas or at great distances from medical centers.

"Although telephone assessment is not a substitute for in-person assessment as conducted by neuropsychologists, many [elderly patients](#) don't have the resources to access a neuropsychologist or ability to spend hours getting to the doctor's office or clinic to receive an evaluation, especially one that would potentially be conducted every few months should that person decide to participate in a clinical trial," says Dr. Mitsis. "A clinical trial, as those run from our Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, requires people to return frequently for follow up. Using telephone assessments as an alternative, especially assessments that are considered sensitive to memory decline as those used in this study, means we can catch [cognitive](#) impairment early and monitor any changes that may occur, in a larger number of individuals. These individuals could be then referred for treatment sooner, prior to significant decline in memory and thinking, which will prolong positive outcomes in functioning."

Source: The Mount Sinai Hospital

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