

Timely depression diagnosis critical to maintain health of elderly

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Depression affects approximately 30 to 40 percent of nursing home residents, but it often goes unrecognized, according to American Geriatrics Society, which can lead to lower quality of life or even suicide. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found a series of indicators, other than changes in mood that are associated with the development of depression in nursing home residents.

"Prompt diagnosis and treatment of depression is essential to improve the quality of life for nursing home residents," said Lorraine Phillips, assistant professor in the Sinclair School of Nursing. "Many elderly people develop certain clinical characteristics at the same time they develop depression. Understanding these changes is essential to quickly and accurately diagnosing depression in nursing home residents."

Changes in characteristics that Phillips found to be associated with the development of depression include increased verbal aggression, urinary incontinence, increased pain, weight loss, changes in care needs, reduced cognitive ability and decline in performance of daily living activities.

"Depression is currently diagnosed using several methods that emphasize mood symptoms including interviewing and self-reporting of depression symptoms," Phillips said. "However, since elderly depression may appear with non-mood symptoms, these characteristics identified in this study can help diagnose depression that may be overlooked by traditional screening methods."

Phillips found that residents with increased verbal aggression were 69 percent more likely to be diagnosed with depression than those who had not shown these changes. Decreases in activities of daily living, such as feeding or dressing one's self, also were associated with increased depression diagnosis. The research indicates that men and women in nursing homes are equally likely to develop depression. This contrasts with the overall population, where women are more likely than men to experience depression.

To study these changes, MU researchers analyzed data on more than 14,000 nursing home residents aged 65 and older who were not diagnosed with depression at the beginning of the study. Researchers analyzed changes in various clinical factors, other than mood changes, to discover which changes were associated with the development of [depression](#) during a three-month interval of time. The data was collected from the Missouri Minimum Data Set, a federally mandated process for clinical assessment of all residents in Medicare- or Medicaid-certified [nursing homes](#).

More information: The study was published in the *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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