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February 2023

Coalition for Older Adults' Social Connectedness

The News



Recent and Upcoming Events:

- It Takes a Village: Addressing Behavioral Health Disparities in the Black Community, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Feb 16 @ 8am PST, register [here](#)

- Foundation for Social Connection: SOCIAL Framework Work, Employment, Labor (WEL) Report Webinar, Feb 23 @ 10am PST, register [here](#)
 - Drs. Carla Perissinotto and Ashwin Kotwal met with a committee from Japan to discuss how to address social isolation and loneliness (SIL) in our world. Read more below.
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CLINICIAN'S CORNER

with Dr. Carla Perissinotto

This month we review a piece I penned with friend and colleague Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad on addressing SIL as medical issues. We then take a look at the relationships social isolation and loneliness may have on the brain.



[Holt-Lunstad & Perissinotto. Social Isolation and Loneliness as Medical Issues.](#)

Key Points: As clinicians observe heightened concerns about social isolation and loneliness (SIL) in patients' lives, Dr. Holt-Lunstad and I highlight the EAR framework for addressing SIL. The framework is presented below for ease of reference.

EAR Framework for Addressing Social Isolation and Loneliness.		
E	Educate	Social connection is part of a healthy lifestyle. Social connection, isolation, and loneliness affect risks for illness and death. Social connections help patients maintain their health, manage existing medical conditions, and adhere to medical regimens.
A	Assess	Document social support, isolation, and loneliness in the electronic health record. Identify patients at risk with the use of validated measures of social isolation and loneliness. Track risk and progress over time.
R	Respond	Reinforce the need for social connection alongside other health risks and protective factors. Integrate psychosocial support from all members of the care team (e.g., clinicians, volunteers, family or caregivers) into patients' treatment. Offer referrals tailored to patients' needs and partner with local community resources. Reassess patients regularly for changing circumstances and needs and respond accordingly.

Holt-Lunstad J, Perissinotto C. Social Isolation and Loneliness as Medical Issues. *N Engl J Med.* 2023 Jan 19;388(3):193-195. doi: 10.1056/NEJMp2208029. Epub 2023 Jan 14. PMID: 36648080.

Why does this matter? While the health effects of SIL have been known, healthcare providers have not had a framework to incorporate SIL assessments into clinical practice. The EAR framework is the first model to guide clinicians in incorporating SIL evaluation into their clinical practice.

[Huang et al. Social isolation and 9-year dementia risk in community-dwelling Medicare beneficiaries in the United States.](#)

Key Points: The authors analyze a data pool of 5000 older adults to examine the association between social isolation and incident dementia. They found that being socially isolated (vs. not socially isolated) was associated with a higher hazard of incident dementia over 9 years (2011 to 2020).

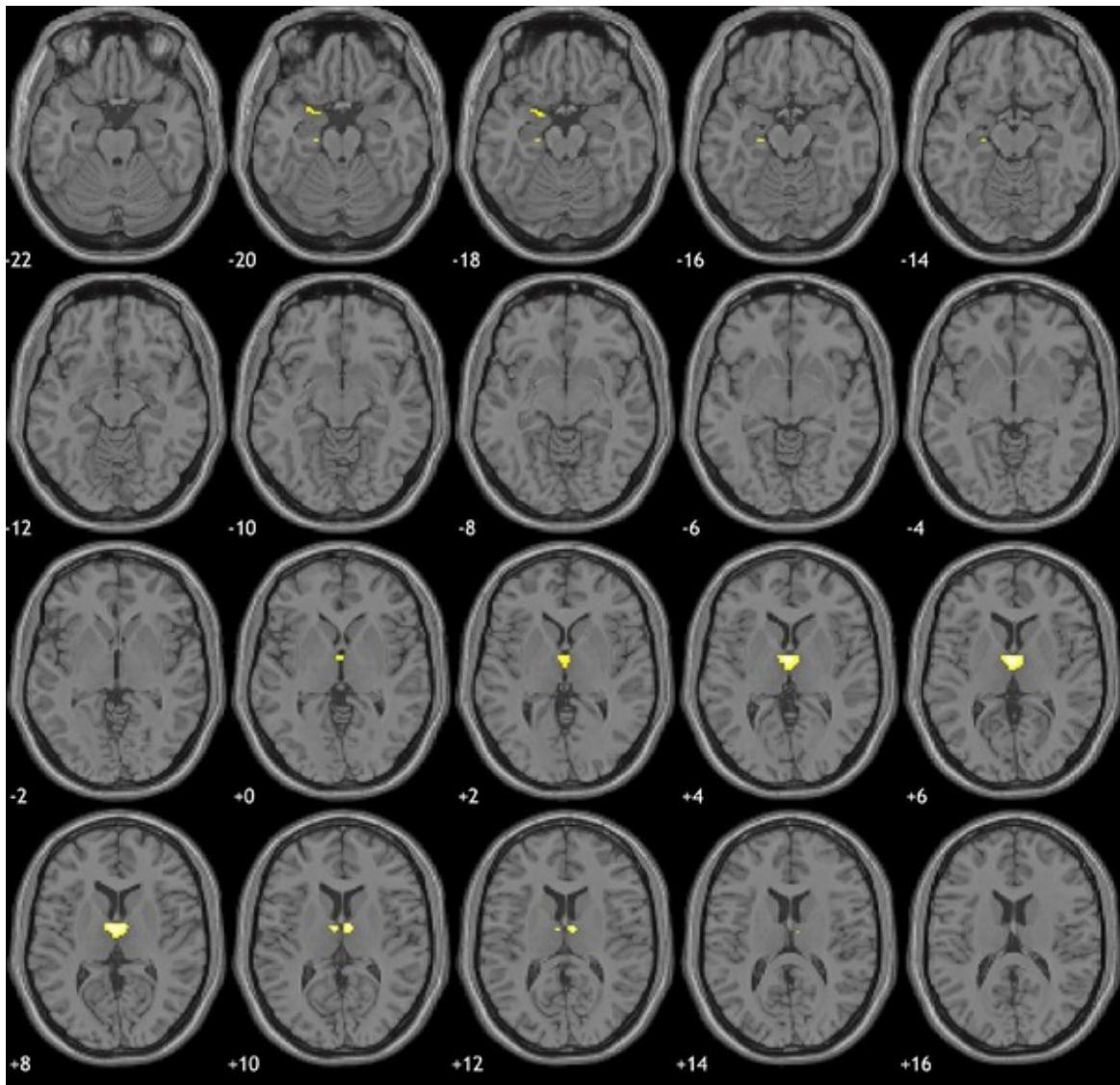
Why does this matter? Cognitive health is something critically important to older adults. This article highlights the importance of social health in protecting cognition. Examining the connection between social isolation and dementia may offer meaningful insights for the development of novel solutions to prevent or relieve dementia.

[Imai et al. Older people with severe loneliness have an atrophied thalamus, hippocampus, and entorhinal cortex.](#)

Key Points: The authors examine features of the brain related to loneliness for 110 older patients with concerns about cognitive dysfunction. The severity of loneliness was associated with reduced grey matter volume in the bilateral thalamus, left hippocampus, and entorhinal cortex of older people. Morphological evidence showed that greater loneliness might be associated with an increased risk of dementia.

Why does this matter? While loneliness is a subjective experience, this study highlights the clear and objective changes in brain structure in people who are lonely. With loneliness being described as an “epidemic of loneliness,” the results of this study may inspire further research on the relationship between dementia and loneliness and inform practice guidelines to undertake preventive measures.

Imai et al. Figure 1: Brain regions where gray matter (GM) volume is significantly negatively correlated with loneliness score.



Drs. Carla Perissinotto and Ashwin Kotwal met with a committee from Japan to discuss how to address social isolation and loneliness (SIL) in our world.



The Japanese delegation met with several local groups in the Bay Area (such as Front Porch in the picture below) to learn about UCSF efforts to address SIL. Though we had much information to share, we were also excited about what we learned from efforts in Japan.



Thanks to the **Joseph & Vera Long Foundation** for their support of the **Coalition for Older Adults' Social Connectedness**.

This newsletter is intended for individuals who want to stay informed on social isolation, loneliness, and social connectedness efforts in Northern CA. Please share your feedback about our newsletter by replying to this email. In 2023, our newsletter will be delivered every 2 months.

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