



February 15, 2006 – More at Midday Outline

SENIOR WELLNESS

With over 36 million Americans older than 65, and the first of the 77 million baby boomers turning 60 this year, a surge of healthcare problems may soon face older adults. According to APA's *Resolution on the 2005 White House Conference on Aging*, 20%-25% of older adults suffer from some form of mental disorder, which can impede physical health and independence. Fortunately, a wide variety of treatments are effective in improving mental and behavioral health problems in later life. ([American Psychological Association](#), December 16, 2005, Press Release).

Along with mental health, a host of issues related to our aging population must be addressed. From healthcare and insurance changes to family and community support, the elderly and those who care for them face a number of challenges. Millions of Americans are providing at least some level of care for the elderly.

Here are 6 common concerns facing this population and a few tips on how to address them:

Concern: Isolation — From peers, family, and community. Feelings of worthlessness plague the elderly when they are not able to participate in everyday activities or when they are deliberately excluded. Loss of motivation and purpose increase this feeling of isolation.

Helpful Tip: Include the elderly in as many family activities as you are able to decrease the isolation. Tap into your community resources for support and activity ideas, such as day centers or church facilities.

Concern: Loss of Independence — Having to wait for someone else to do something for them further increases feelings of helplessness, isolation, and depression. Not being able to do daily activities is something we often take for granted.

Helpful Tip: Even when a person moves slowly or is unable to do something for himself or herself, at least let them do some small part of the chore or task if they are able. Acknowledge their contribution and let them know it is valued.

Concern: Physical Limitations — Progressive deterioration of health. Again, feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, and being overwhelmed prevail. Not being able to handle a situation or circumstance of life increases frustration and often causes depression. Ongoing pain, fears of falling, and other safety concerns are paramount with the elderly. Unreported health concerns go unreported more with this population than any other.



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Helpful Tip: Encourage them to ask questions and share any concerns about their health, medications, and any physical limitations. Be sure to check with their insurance plan to access valuable Physical Therapy benefits. Continue to include the person in as much activity as possible with others. Let the person handle as much as is feasible and appropriate, even if they can't do it fully.

Concern: Loss of Spouse and Friends — Loss of a spouse or significant other is often unmanageable for the elderly. Allow them time to grieve, mourn, and vent their feelings. This requires patience and acceptance. Loss of same-age friends is difficult at any age. With the elderly, these events are magnified because it brings them face-to-face with their own pending mortality.

Helpful Tip: Go through old pictures of better times with them, allow them some time to reminisce, acknowledge their pain, and let them know it's okay to feel as they do. Allow them to grieve. Be patient.

Concern: Loss of Appreciation and Consideration by Others — Making decisions for the elderly without their input or consent is presumptuous and imposing, no matter how well-meant.

Helpful Tip: If they are able to participate in the decision-making process, let them do so. Don't assume you know what it is they want or what's best for them.

Concern: Condescending Attitudes of Others — Assuming that the person is not intelligent or capable just because they're elderly is disrespectful and rude. Ignoring the value of their wisdom and experience is a mistake.

Helpful Tip: Remind yourself that this elderly man or woman once had an active, meaningful life too. The wisdom of their experience is always valuable to our society, even if "things have changed." As much as society has seen myriads of changes and technology, people are still basically the same. Give them the courtesy that you would extend to any other person.

For more information, contact Sherry Hurt, MA, LPC, Clinical Program Manager for Older Adult Services, or Amy Willis, LCSW, Program Manager for Older Adults with Substance Abuse, at Centerstone, at 615-460-4430.

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), celebrating 50 years of service in 2006, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. A not-for-profit organization, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of



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all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Each year, the organization provides services to more than 45,000 individuals. The Centerstone network includes more than 60 facilities throughout the middle Tennessee region.

For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.