

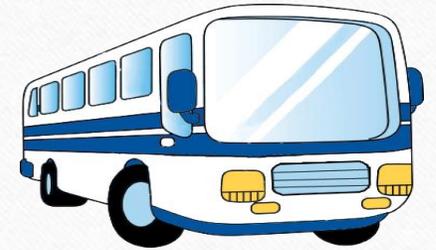
Laurie Thomas, MPA
Healthy Aging Manager
Maricopa County Department
of Public Health

**Health Risks of Social Isolation
in the Elderly:**

How Health Literacy Plays a Part



The social determinants of health—
education, housing, transportation, food,
neighborhood, and community resources—
influence health literacy and may be more
important than the clinical services that are
delivered to the health of older adults.



Literacy and Aging

- Adults age 65+ make up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population.
- The complexity of health care delivery continues to grow, creating challenges that are magnified for older adults
- Age is one of the highest correlates of low health literacy.

Age-related Changes that Contribute to the Decline of Health Literacy

- Decline in cognitive abilities
- The development of physical impairments such as hearing and vision loss,
- Psychosocial issues, and a sense of embarrassment and shame.

How Basic Technology Gets in the Way of Health Literacy

- Automated phone systems with long and multiple menus of buttons
- Long wait times before reaching a live human
- Not having equipment or technical ability for telehealth appointments

Telemedicine

Barriers

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

Using Telehealth/Telemedicine to Improve Care

- Convenience, Money and Time Savings
- Remote patient monitoring for weight, blood pressure, heart rate, pacemaker
- Diagnoses of common medical problems such as headache, sore throat, back pain, digestive troubles and increasing acuity

Cont.

- Post-treatment check ins or follow up for chronic care
- Faster refill of short-term medical prescriptions
- Appts. for holidays, weekends, late night or any other situation when regular medical care is not possible
- Appts. for patients unable to leave the house due to sickness or bad weather conditions

New Ways to Bill for Telehealth

In early March, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) gave the authority to temporarily waive certain Medicare requirements for telehealth services and approved dozens of new billing codes to allow medical professionals to bill for services.

How it Works

Example: Patients have a scheduled time. They receive a text saying, “this is your provider please join me in a secure call”. Patient selects the link. The video conference opens so you can see each other. FaceTime or Google Hangouts can also be used.

Solutions to Telehealth Barriers

Provider to:



- Smile
- Slow down when speaking
- Ask what the patient wants to get out of the appt/treatment

Cont.

- Use easy to understand medical language
- Physically draw a picture or diagram
- Do math or computation for the patient

Ask patients to demonstrate understanding

- “What will you tell your spouse about your condition?”
- “I want to be sure I explained everything clearly, so can you please explain it back to me so I can be sure I did.”
- “Show me what you would do.”

Patient's Responsibility

- Bring a note taker to apt.
- Write down medical questions before apt.
- Bring an interpreter if there is a language barrier
- Wear hearing aid (new batteries) and glasses



Telehealth Breakdowns from Practitioner Side

- Patient not knowing how to access links/use IT
- Taking 10 minutes of appt. to find and put in hearing aids
- Not having a list of medicines or medication bottles
- Patient having webmd open on another device
- Slow broadband

Real Patient Comment During Telehealth Visit

Specialist: Who is your primary doctor?

Patient: I don't have a family doctor in AZ. I only live here **8** months out of the year, my doctor is at home in Iowa. 😊

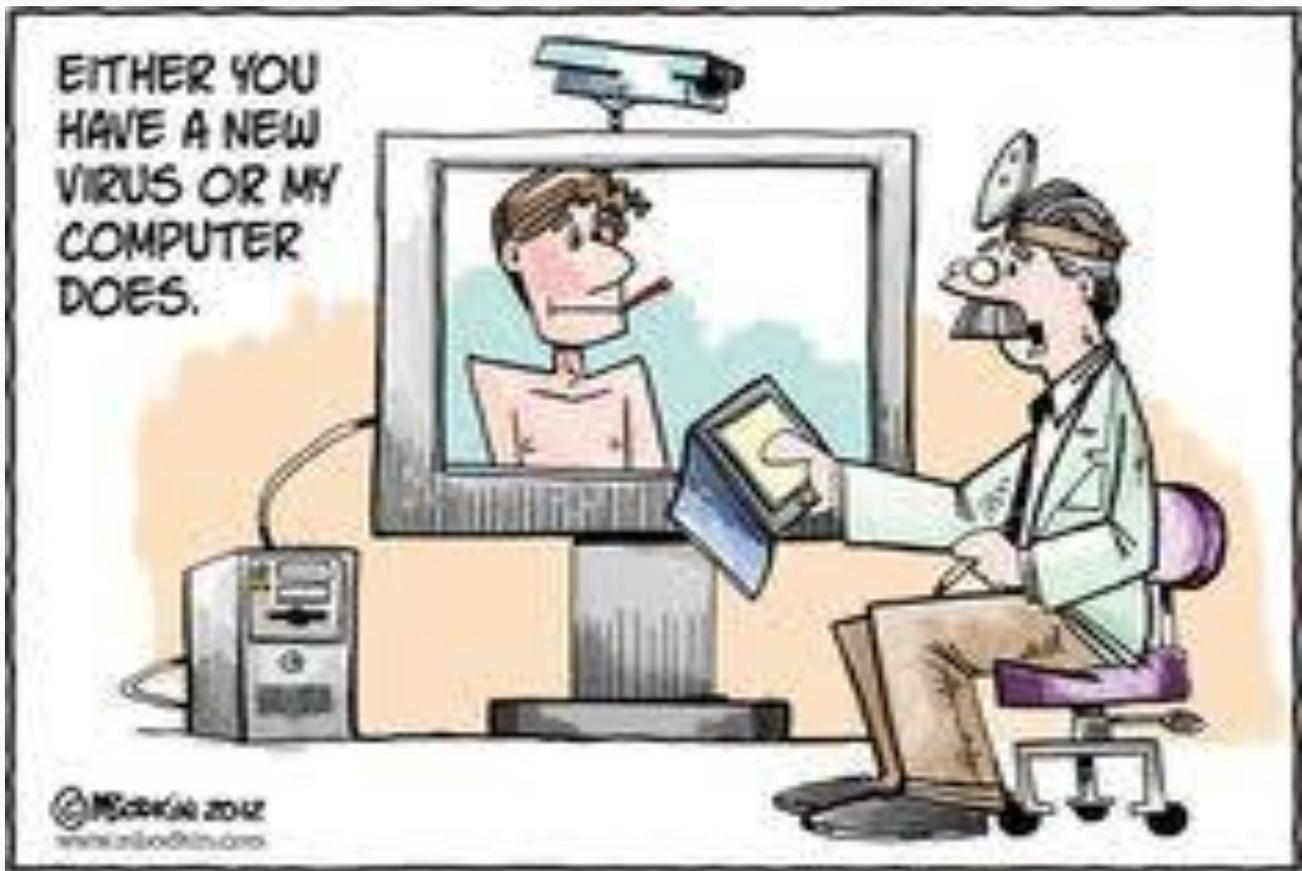
Patient: How can I hand you this urine specimen through the computer?



CARTOONSTOCK

Search ID: mdbn349

*I'm reading old magazines in my doctor's
telemedical waiting room!*



Social Isolation

- Social isolation refers to an objective lack of social contact with others; loneliness, a subjective sense of being left out and ignored, can strike even when people are surrounded by others.

Social Isolation is Associated With

- Significantly higher rates of heart disease and stroke
- 50 percent increased risk of dementia, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.
- Being the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

- A greater incidence of depression, anxiety and suicide.
- A mortality rate comparable to that linked to smoking, obesity, excessive alcohol consumption and physical inactivity.

<https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>

- [A 2017 study](#) estimated \$6.7 billion in additional Medicare costs annually among older adults in social isolation.
- A quarter of people over 65 who live independently are considered socially isolated, according to a 2018 [study published in The Journals of Gerontology](#).
- 43 percent of people over 60 report feeling lonely, according to another [study in JAMA Internal Medicine](#) — **and that was before COVID-19.**

“We have restricted something that’s pretty essential. We need to move away from thinking of visitors to old people as optional.”

Dr. Ken Covinsky, a geriatrician at the University of California, San Francisco, who has been a co-author on studies on loneliness on quarantined loved ones.

Minister of Loneliness

In 2018, UK Prime Minister Theresa May appointed a Minister of Loneliness to implement a national strategy to combat social isolation and loneliness.

As part of their response to COVID-19, NHS England announced Good Samaritan, a mobile phone application where volunteers sign up to deliver food and medicines, drive patients to appointments, and phone socially isolated individuals.



Nothing can replace human contact and touch



Social Isolation and Literacy

Retirement, difficulty driving, hearing and vision loss, cognitive or physical problems that make getting out difficult **and social isolation from COVID-19** — all contribute to a troubling tide of disconnection.



Reducing the Threat of Isolation

1. Plan and connect

Regularly scheduled phone calls and video conferences along with texting and emails can help compensate for a lack of in-person contact.....

2. Remember pets

Pets can help combat loneliness, and some pets have been linked with owners' longevity.



3. Know who's most at risk for social isolation and loneliness

People at the highest risk of COVID-19 are also the most at risk of increased social isolation and loneliness.

COVID-19 has also magnified disparities for low-income older adults. Internet coverage gaps — the digital divide.



How to Get Started Using Technology for Isolation and to Improve Literacy

- Start with Low tech
- Build on the devices they currently own (land line phone, smart phone -Face time or Google Hangouts), TV, smart speaker Echo, tablet, computer
- **Think team** – to implement technology involve a family member, significant other, assistive technology specialist, ADRC staff, rehabilitation, occupational or speech specialist

- Try before you buy, what is the Return policy?,
www.Aztap.org AzTAP assists persons with disabilities of all types and ages as well as family members, service providers, employers and the general public to become better educated about the value and use of assistive technology. AzTAP can help you choose the right technology and fund the purchase.

- FCC program helps provide low income subscribers a discount on monthly telephone service, broadband Internet access, or voice-broadband purchased from participating providers.

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/lifeline-support-affordable-communications>

- Cox program

<https://www.cox.com/residential/internet/connect2compute.html> internet connectivity at low rates

- Senior Planet: Older Adults Technology Service (Oats) <http://oats.org> help older adults use technology to transform themselves and their communities in positive ways.
- Tools for Life, is dedicated to increasing access to and acquisition of assistive technology (AT) devices <https://gatfl.gatech.edu/index.php>

Smart Speakers Amazon Alexa/Echo and Google Home can do Amazing Things to Keep Someone Company

1. Make a phone call for you

To any of your contacts in your phone

2. Set a timer or a reminder to take your medication

3. Send a hug

Let your friends and family know in seconds that you're thinking of them by sending a hug. Just say, "Send a hug" to deliver to your programmed Alexa contacts.



14. Get the latest news

The [NPR Hourly News Summary](#) is a 5-minute news briefing. You can also say “Tell me some good news”

15. Turn your lights on or off

You can simply tell the speaker to turn off your connected lights. You'll need a smart plug or a smart light for this to work.

16. Follow your favorite sports teams

The digital assistant can give you details such as scores and upcoming schedules for NFL, NBA, MLS, MLB, NHL, WNBA, NCAA, and other American sports.



4. Get a weather report

Gives you accurate, up-to-the-minute weather information.

5. Tell Jokes

6. Talk in different languages

Multilingual Mode lets you talk in two different languages, and Alexa will understand either dialect. The service is available in the U.S., India and Canada.

6. Get help for your pet

If your pet is sick [MyPetDoc](#) can help you diagnose what's wrong or get a veterinarian referral.

7. Get recipe ideas

Some skills include [Easy Meal Ideas](#) for quick-and-easy recipe recommendations,



8. Listen to audiobooks

You can listen to or 'read' a book while doing other things.

9. Play music

You can ask to hear songs from many genres from a vast library.

You can also stream music using from a variety of services

10. Use as a personal trainer

You can whip into shape with the [7-minute-workout skill](#) and others.

11. Clean your apartment

Many robot vacuums, can be commanded to start and stop cleaning

12. Play games

There are a ton of different trivia-related skills, but some include [Rock, Paper, Scissors, Lizard, Spock](#); [20 questions](#); [bingo](#); [Jeopardy](#); [tic-tac-toe](#).

13. Get help in emergencies

[Ask My Buddy](#) will send a notification (text, SMS or phone call) to a preselected contact when you're in an emergency and can't reach your phone. This feature is not a substitute for 911.

17. Listen to a podcast

Anypod allows you to stream your podcasts to a speaker. You can search by name, subscribe to podcasts, skip ahead or back, and when you pause an episode, it'll pick up right where you left off.

<https://www.cnet.com/how-to/the-best-things-you-can-do-with-amazon-echo/>

Resources

- Keogh helps anyone statewide apply free for AHCCCS, SNAP, TANF online <http://keoghhealthconnection.org/> (602) 266-0397
- <https://findhelpphx.org/> no cost resources in Maricopa County
- <https://aarpcommunityconnections.org>
- CRN has 24/7 365 days a year warm line 602-427-4600
- **What is the Warm Line?**
A telephone service staffed by peers who have dealt with behavioral health issues themselves. Warm Line counselors do not help callers with substance abuse issues, but Crisis Line counselors can
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) at 800-662-HELP (4357)

[Area Agencies on Agingexternal icon](#) (AAA)—A network of over 620 organizations across America that provides information and assistance with programs including nutrition and meal programs (counseling and home-delivered or group meals), caregiver support, and more. The website can help you find your local AAA, which may provide classes in Tai Chi and diabetes self-management.

[Duet](#)

[Foundation for Senior Living](#)

[Eldercare Locatorexternal icon](#)—A free national service that helps find local resources for seniors such as financial support, caregiving services, and transportation.

[National Council on Aging](#)[external icon](#)—Works with nonprofit organizations, governments, and businesses to provide comm. programs and services. Lists senior programs available to assist with healthy aging and financial security, including the Aging Mastery Program[®] that is shown to increase social connectedness and healthy eating habits.

[AARP](#)[external icon](#)—Provides helpful information to seniors to help improve quality of life and provides access to Community Connection Tools.

QUESTIONS

