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Matters of Note

Loneliness at epidemic levels in America

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According to a survey published online January 23, 2020 by the health insurer Cigna, more than three in five Americans are lonely, with more and more people reporting feelings of being left out, being poorly understood and lacking companionship. Since 2018 when the survey was first conducted, there has been a nearly 13% rise in loneliness.

Pervasive loneliness has widespread effects and is strongly linked to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. More and more research suggests that the impacts don't end with mental health, but evidence points to the fact that relationships impact *physical* health as well.

The Cigna report found loneliness to be more common among men and heavy users of social media were more lonely as compared with light users. Feelings of isolation were prevalent across generations, with Gen Z (18–22 years old) having the highest average loneliness score while Baby Boomers (55–73 years old) had the lowest.

The new research dives deeper into the factors behind the feeling of isolation and finds that workplace conditions make a difference in how lonely people feel. In-person connections and good co-worker relationships as well as work-life balance go a long way toward mitigating and minimizing loneliness.

To read the report and find loneliness resources, see: <https://www.cigna.com/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combatting-loneliness/>

Nearly 600 front-line health care workers died of COVID-19

As of June 10, 2020, “Lost on the Frontline,” a collaboration between Kaiser Health News and *The Guardian* dedicated to counting, verifying and memorializing every health care worker who dies during the pandemic, has identified nearly 600 front-line health care workers who likely died of COVID-19 after helping patients during the pandemic. The tally includes doctors, nurses, and paramedics as well as crucial health care support staff like janitors, administrators and nursing home workers, all of whom have put their own lives at risk to help care for others. A majority of those documented were identified as people of color, mostly African American and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

In addition to tracking deaths, Lost on the Frontline reports on the challenges health care workers are facing during the pandemic including widespread equipment shortages.

This project aims to document the lives of US health workers who die of Covid-19, and to understand why so many are falling victim to the pandemic. As of this writing, over 100 profiles of workers whose

deaths have been confirmed are published at: <https://khn.org/news/lost-on-the-frontline-health-care-worker-death-toll-covid19-coronavirus-2/>

Meditation and aerobic exercise relieve stress in medical school students

According to a Rutgers study published online May 11, 2020 in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, researchers found meditation combined with aerobic exercise reduces stress and rumination while enhancing the quality of life for medical students.

Over an eight-week period, first and second-year medical school students participated in an intervention called MAP (Mental and Physical) Train My Brain twice a week. The intervention included 30 min of meditation followed by 30 min of aerobic exercise. The control group of students did neither activity.

The study found that students doing the MAP Training experienced significantly less stress and were approximately 20 percent less likely to ruminate with depressive and brooding thoughts when compared to medical students in the control group.

Most importantly, researchers say, is that the medical school students involved in the study said the training improved their quality of life, with 84 percent saying they would recommend MAP Train My Brain™ to future patients as a way to alleviate anxiety and stress and improve overall health.

To read the study, see: <https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2019.0281>

New advocacy group aims to give ‘every physician’ a voice

United Physicians (UP) is a recently launched advocacy organization devoted to giving “every physician” a voice in decisions affecting their professional lives. The group plans to reverse the current top-down approach to decision making seen in many medical societies where leaders and delegates dictate priorities.

UP founder, Paul Teirstein, MD, chief of cardiology for Scripps Clinic in La Jolla, California, said the intention is to use online voting and discussions among physicians across specialties to advocate for more and better legislation on issues crucial for their profession, while protecting the physician-patient relationship.

Teirstein feels there is a need for a broad-based organization that will respond to the voice of practicing physicians rather than dictate legislative priorities from management ranks as physicians busy with their practices are lacking a unified voice.

United Physicians will use meetings and votes held by members online to decide which projects to pursue. Fees would be kept nominal, leadership will be voluntary to mitigate conflict of interest and

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Teirstein stresses that he sees UP as being complementary to other organizations, like the AMA, rather than in competition.

For more information, see: <https://unitedphysicians.org/>

Diet and nutrition have profound effects on gut microbiome

According to a literature review by scientists from the George Washington University (GW) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) published in *Nutrition Reviews* on March 25, 2020, diet and nutrition have a profound impact on microbial composition in the gut. This impact in turn affects a range of metabolic, hormonal, and neurological processes.

The review systematically assessed the current understanding of the interactions between nutrition and the gut microbiome in healthy adults. Through their review, the authors found that research has mostly focused on the benefits of dietary fiber, which serves as fuel for gut microbiota, and also found that, in contrast, protein promotes microbial protein metabolism and potentially harmful byproducts that may sit in the gut, increasing the risk of negative health outcomes.

The prevalence of diseases that may involve disruption of the gut microbiome are increasing and the authors conclude there is no consensus on what defines a “healthy” gut microbiome and that future research must consider individual responses to diet.

To read the review, see: <https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuz106>

Millennials overtake baby boomers as America’s largest generation

According to population estimates from the US Census Bureau, as of July 1, 2019, Millennials have surpassed Baby Boomers as the nation’s largest living adult generation. Millennials, defined as ages 23 to 38 in 2019, numbered 72.1 million and Boomers, defined as ages 55–73, numbered 71.6 million. Generation X, defined as ages 39–54, are projected to pass the Baby Boomers in population by the year 2028.

Baby Boomers, whose generation was defined by the boom in US births following World War II, are aging, so their numbers are shrinking in size, whereas, the Millennial generation is continuing to grow as young immigrants expand its ranks.

To see the projections, see: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/28/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers-as-americas-largest-generation/>

Small majority of Twitter users produce majority of tweets

Twitter users turn to the social networking site for real-time information and reactions to the day’s news, but compared with the US public overall, which voices are represented? The Pew Research Center conducted a nationally representative survey to explore this question.

The analysis showed that the 22% of American adults who use Twitter are representative of the general population in certain ways, but not others. Twitter users are younger, more highly educated, have higher incomes than US adults overall and are more likely to identify as Democrats. The same users differ on some key social issues, however. For example, Twitter users are somewhat more likely to say that immigrants strengthen the country as opposed to weaken it and see evidence of racial and gender-based inequalities.

The findings also indicate that the median user tweets just twice each month, but a small number of users, just 10%, are responsible for 80% of all tweets created by US users. They are much more likely to be women and more likely to say they regularly tweet about politics. Despite the number of tweets, the active users differ only modestly, or not at all, from the rest of the Twitter population.

To read the details, see: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/>

Maryland University of Integrative Health announces educational partnership with the American Institute of Stress

On May 28, 2020, Maryland University of Integrative Health (MUIH) announced a new collaboration with the American Institute of Stress. The two entities have entered an educational partnership with the shared goal of promoting strategies for coping with stress; a health concern experienced by 55% of Americans according to the latest annual Gallup Poll on stress.

The collaboration expands MUIH’s role as a leader in integrative health, which includes the use of holistic and natural approaches to promote well-being. The partnership will provide educational opportunities for health and healthcare providers to support clients and patients who are coping with the negative impacts of stress and to teach them how to improve their wellbeing.

For more information about MUIH Professional and Continuing Education offerings, visit www.muih.edu/ce.

Intermittent fasting promotes weight loss, improves lipids

According to a small pilot study published online December 5, 2019 in *Cell Metabolism*, limiting food consumption to a 10-hour window each day promotes weight loss and improves cardiometabolic abnormalities in people with metabolic syndrome.

Study participants were instructed to restrict food consumption to 10 hours a day, creating a 14-hour fast each night. Over the 12 weeks of the study, participants lost approximately 3% of their body weight, an amount comparable to that achieved by restricting calories and increasing exercise, though they were instructed to do neither.

The time-restricted eating strategy also had a number of favorable effects on cardiometabolic parameters. There were significant reductions in total cholesterol, systolic and diastolic blood pressure, and among those with elevated fasting glucose levels, there was a significant reduction in A1c. These improvements were observed independent of any change in physical activity and were independent of weight loss.

Additionally, time-restricted eating induces and maintains a consistent feeding and fasting cycle that supports strong circadian rhythms and approximately 70% of the group reported that they were more satisfied with the amount they slept.

Over one quarter of the group chose to follow the time-restricted eating strategy after completing the 12-week intervention; about one third followed the strategy at least part of the time and the remainder abandoned the plan at the end of the study.

To read the details, see: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cmet.2019.11.004>
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