

Tips for Nurses: Psychosocial assessment and support



What it is: Psychosocial support includes psychological and social aspects of a person's life. It acknowledges their emotions, thoughts, attitudes, motivation, and behavioural needs as well as their social circumstances. This includes their sense of identity, relationships or living arrangements.

Why it matters: Frailty, loss of independence, financial stress, changed living arrangements, or social isolation can cause an older person stress. A life-limiting illness can make it even harder to adapt and cope. Together this can lead to anxiety, depression, grief, distress, fear of becoming a burden, loneliness, and a sense of helplessness or loss of identity and meaning.

Identifying and addressing a person's psychosocial needs is important. Recognising and understanding the family's role and need for support is also important.

What I need to know: There are validated tools available to assess and monitor psychosocial needs.

Ongoing meaningful conversations (with empathy and active listening) can assist you to identify any needs or concerns. They also provide the base to engage support that can help.

Psychosocial needs are best addressed by a multidisciplinary team.

Physical symptoms indicating possible psychosocial needs include:

- breathlessness
- insomnia
- pain
- sadness
- crying
- or changes to appetite, weight, or sleep.

Actions

Compassionate communication is important especially if the older person is feeling lonely or isolated. You can:

- take time to talk with the older person and their family, and actively listen
- ask them how they feel and what they think they need
- use open questions to elicit how the person is feeling e.g. 'What would help?' is better than 'Do you need help?'
- encourage them to participate in activities and connect with others in the facility or their community
- consider the government-funded Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme which arranges for volunteers to visit with older people.

Look out for physical symptoms and assess and monitor these carefully.

Use the same tool to assess and monitor for change.

Consider massage, art therapy, music therapy, spiritual support, counselling, psychoeducational interventions, telemonitoring, environmental changes and psychotherapy.

Provide information about support groups for carers and families.

Tools

Geriatric Anxiety Inventory (GAI)

Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS)

Two-Question Screen

Carer Support Needs Assessment Tool (CSNAT)

Carers' Alert Thermometer (CAT)

Name:

My reflections:

What approaches to psychosocial assessment are used in my workplace?

How can I support a client or resident's psychosocial needs?

My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice
Tip Sheets:
Person-centred care
Talking about dying
Supporting families

For references and the latest version of all the Tip Sheets visit
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