

# Grief, Loss and Depression in Older Adults

By Amy C. Champagne, BSN, RN

THE MEDICAL TEAM, INC.

Retiring from a longtime job, experiencing the passing of loved ones, or eventually losing independence, seniors face many losses. Regardless of the source, a common and natural response to loss is grief. Grief is a natural process, an intense fundamental emotion, a universal experience which makes us human. Grief itself is a normal and natural response to loss. Acknowledging the grief promotes the healing process. Grief can be exhibited with both physical and behavioral responses, ranging from crying and appetite loss, to anger, anxiety and difficulty focusing.

Grief and loss can be helped with therapeutic counseling. Grief should not necessarily be labeled as clinical depression and does not generally warrant the use of antidepressants. In cases where clinical depression is diagnosed then individuals should be aware that it is a medical problem which can be treated with medication, therapy and support.



The National Institute of Mental Health reports that only about 10 percent of seniors suffering from depression receive treatment. Many seniors do not seek treatment or feel comfortable discussing depression and loss with their physicians. Pursuing active treatment can help those with clinical depression or persistent grief get back to enjoying life and minimize the risk of medical problems or in the worst case, suicide. Untreated depression can lead to stroke, heart attack and other medical problems. When depression is treated, studies show that seniors respond very well. For example, a Pittsburgh Medical Center study found that 80 percent of seniors treated over a three-year period didn't suffer recurrent bouts.

Early identification and treatment of depression is key to healthy living. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services



announced that effective October 14, 2011 Medicare will pay for annual depression screening for adults when performed in primary care settings such as physician's offices, outpatient hospitals, and various outpatient clinics. For qualifying individuals, the Medicare coinsurance and Part B deductibles are waived for these preventative services.

Fortunately, there are programs that can provide in-home treatment for those diagnosed with depression and other behavioral health diagnoses. THE MEDICAL TEAM developed one such specialty program with a nationally- recognized expert on psychiatric home care.

THE MEDICAL TEAM's Journey Behavioral Home Health Program is a program to which Louisiana physicians refer to regularly. The program is designed to provide physician ordered nursing visits to older individuals with an emphasis to keep them living independently in their own homes. The program has also been successful in treating seniors who are having a difficult time adjusting to a new environment, such as moving in with a child or to an independent or assisted living facility.

Hayley Folse, RN and lead Behavioral Health Nurse says "THE MEDICAL TEAM's unique research-based program helps those who are becoming isolated in their homes and addresses the mental health and behavioral challenges associated with grief and loss, transitional trauma, depression and other behavioral health diagnoses. No matter one's age, life presents many unexpected challenges. Individuals facing emotional and behavioral challenges are certainly not alone. Help from certified professionals and programs can play an instrumental role in improving lives."

