

The 15th Annual Ginny Thomas Geriatric Symposium

October 8, 2025

(Pocatello, Meridian, Anchorage)

Dear Symposium Participant,

Welcome to the 15th Annual Ginny Thomas Geriatric Symposium! This year's theme, The Power of Social Connection: Addressing Loneliness and Isolation, reflects a growing awareness of the impact that loneliness has on the health and well-being of older adults. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General identified loneliness and isolation as a public health epidemic, citing the link between them and increased risks of depression, heart disease, dementia, and premature death.

Our purpose today is to bring together healthcare students, professionals, and older adults from our communities to explore this important issue. Through a keynote presentation, expert panel discussion, and interprofessional case study discussions, we hope you will gain new perspectives, deepen your understanding, and consider how you can help strengthen social connections in your daily lives.

***We gratefully acknowledge our donors and sponsors
who make this event possible!***

Keynote Presentation:

As you listen to our keynote speaker, consider the following questions:

1. What specific health risks are associated with loneliness and isolation?
2. What strategies could reduce isolation in older adults and how might these also be applicable to younger people as well?
3. How might these ideas apply to your personal life and professional practice?

Notes:

Panel Discussion: Addressing Loneliness and Isolation

During the panel discussion, reflect on these questions:

1. What different perspectives did you hear from the panelists and what ideas stood out most?
2. How can healthcare systems, community programs, and families work together more effectively to address these issues?
3. What role do students and emerging professionals have in building more connected communities?
4. How might these strategies and resources benefit people of all ages?

Notes:

This workbook is designed to be a valuable resource throughout the Symposium and beyond. Use it to jot down key insights, questions, and ideas that arise during the presentations and discussions. We encourage you to actively engage in the interprofessional activities and to consider how you can contribute to building age-friendly communities in your future practice.

Source: “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community” (2023) available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Interprofessional Case Study and Roundtable Discussion Reflection

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify the impacts of loneliness and isolation on health outcomes.
2. Describe the contributions of at least five different professions in addressing these impacts.
3. Generate strategies that involve healthcare professionals, family, and community resources to more effectively build social connections.

Introduction:

In this **60-minute** activity, you will work as a group with individuals at your table, which should include a faculty facilitator, students representing different healthcare professions, and an older adult community member representing the patient's care partner. (Your table may not have a representative from all these groups, but information will be provided in the packet to help fill in gaps and provide additional information if needed). You should review the learning objectives together and work through the questions provided and supplement them with your own conversations and insights that are generated during your conversations.

PART 1: Gaining an Understanding of Healthcare Team Members *(10 minutes)*

Students: Introduce yourself briefly and describe your profession and its role as part of an interprofessional healthcare team. Please include specific expertise and training that your profession "brings to the table," what sets you apart from other professions, in what ways you interact most often with other professions, and any other information you feel is pertinent

Part 2: Loneliness and Isolation Case Study *(40 minutes)*

For the case study portion of the activity, your group should use the following case study as a guide for discussion of these issues, applying what you've learned from the keynote address and panel discussion, along with the unique insights of individuals in your group and their own life experiences. This is only a framework to guide your conversations, feel free to utilize your own personal and professional experiences to enrich the conversation and address the learning objectives of this activity.

Case Study: Agnes

Agnes, a 78-year-old woman, experiences loneliness and social isolation due to a recent move and health issues, impacting her mental and physical well-being. She is a recent widow, and her daughter and son-in-law asked her to consider moving closer to them. She declined at first, not wanting to pack all her belongings, for she had many possessions between her and her husband. But after many discussions with her daughter, she decided to move.

Agnes grieves the loss of her husband, married for 57 years, and she struggles to connect with the new community. She feels isolated due to mobility issues and a recent diagnosis of arthritis. Her little house is much smaller than the big house she and her husband built together, and she can't seem to find room for all her things. It's just not the same, she now lives surrounded by unpacked boxes stacked in the corner of her bedroom, a daily reminder of what she has lost.

Agnes reports feeling increasingly lonely, withdrawn, and experiencing periods of sadness and anxiety. She avoids social events and rarely leaves her house, leading to a decline in her physical activity and a deterioration of her overall health. Her daughter and husband are working during the week, and call Agnes only on weekends.

These symptoms are also contributing to a worsening of her arthritis, decreased appetite, and sleep disturbances. Her mental health is also deteriorating, with increased anxiety and depression. Agnes cries a lot because she misses her old friends back home — the Knitters Club to which she was the President, her church group who played pinochle every Tuesday, and the dance troupe she so enjoyed with her husband.

Current Medications:

- Acetaminophen 500 mg, as needed for arthritis pain
- Sertraline 25 mg daily, for anxiety/depression (recently started by her physician)
- Trazodone 50 mg at bedtime, as needed for sleep

Discussion Questions

If Agnes were in your community, how might you help her? Consider the following dimensions:

- **Mental health:** Anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and loss of close relationships
- **Physical health:** Access to a doctor in town, mobility support, pain management
- **Medication management:** How might her medications help or complicate her situation? What side effects or interactions should be considered?

- **Nutrition:** Weight loss, eating alone, skipping meals, difficulty with grocery shopping
- **Community support/activities:** What opportunities might exist for neighbors, senior centers, or hobby groups?
- **Religious affiliation:** Role of faith community in social connection
- **Transportation:** Options for Agnes to get around town safely
- **Technology & media:** How could television, phone, or video calls help keep her connected?
- **Other community resources or support networks:** From what you've learned today, what other resources exist to help people like Agnes better deal with isolation
- What part(s) of Agnes' story resonate most with your own experience or those of people you know?
- How might what Agnes is experiencing also manifest in a younger adult or college student? What strategies might be beneficial to address loneliness and isolation at any age?

Discussion and take-home points from your group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Wrap-up and Concluding Remarks (10 minutes)

1. What is ONE important thing you learned today about the impact of loneliness and isolation on older adults?
2. How can your profession specifically contribute to reducing loneliness in patients like Agnes?
3. What did you learn from other professions during the case study that broadened your perspective?
4. What is one strategy or resource you could recommend tomorrow to help an older adult in your community feel more connected?
5. What is one concrete way you might strengthen connection in your own life, family, or community?

NOTES:
