



# Social & Romantic Relationships in Long- Term Care

KIMBERLY CASSIE, PHD, MSSW, MA

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

ANNE & HENRY ZARROW SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

[KMCASSIE@OU.EDU](mailto:KMCASSIE@OU.EDU)

# Sex Happens....

Check your biases, attitudes, beliefs

- ▶ In a nationally representative study of over 3,000 community-dwelling adults in US aged 57-85 found:
  - Aged 57-64: 73% sexually active
  - Aged 65-74: 53% sexually active
  - Aged 75-85: 26% sexually active<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Women report being less sexually active than men<sup>1</sup>
  - Death of sexual partner
    - Women tend to marry older partners
    - Men have lower life expectancies than women
  - Older women less likely to admit to sexual desires than men

# A Few Facts

- ▶ Sex is a normal part of life
- ▶ Older adults have sex and sexual desires
- ▶ Sexually active individuals are physically and mentally healthier than those that are less sexually active\*<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Sexually active older adults are happier than those that are not sexually active<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Sexual abilities change with age and disabilities
- ▶ In 2018, according to the CDC, sexually transmitted diseases doubled in the previous 10 years among those aged 65 and older
- ▶ We should expect nursing home residents to have sexual desires and to want to act on those desires
- ▶ Residents of long-term care facilities are not immune to sexually transmitted diseases.

# Acceptable, Problematic, & Potentially Problematic Social & Romantic Relationships in Long-Term Care

- ▶ Male resident makes sexual advances toward staff during personal care
- ▶ Resident makes sexually derogatory comments toward staff
- ▶ Resident exposes genitalia in public areas of the facility
- ▶ Resident masturbates in public areas
- ▶ Dementia resident wanders into other rooms and into bed with other residents
- ▶ Two residents are found having sex in the facility
- ▶ Married dementia resident is found having sex with in the facility with someone other than their partner by marriage
- ▶ Staff gossip about “dirty old man” in room 203
- ▶ Other?

# F607

“The facility have and implement written policies and procedures to prevent and prohibit all types of abuse, neglect....that achieves (but is not limited to):

- Establishing a safe environment that supports, to the extent possible, a resident’s consensual sexual relationship and by establishing policies and protocols for preventing sexual abuse, such as identify when, how, and by whom determination of capacity to consent to a sexual contact will be made and where this documentation will be recorded; and the resident’s right to establish a relationship with another individual, which may include the development of or the presence of an ongoing sexually intimate relationship...”

Source: <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/GuidanceforLawsAndRegulations/Downloads/Appendix-PP-State-Operations-Manual.pdf>

# Considerations

- ▶ Ethics Committee
- ▶ Communicate, Communicate, Then Communicate Some More
- ▶ Environmental Considerations
- ▶ Sexual Aids & Adaptive Equipment
- ▶ Staff Training & Sensitivity Exercises
- ▶ Balance Resident Right To Sexual Expression & Resident Right To Live In An Environment Free of Abuse
- ▶ Demonstrate Respect For Sexual Expression By Example
- ▶ Availability of Condoms To Prevent STD
- ▶ Facility Sexuality Consultant
- ▶ Recognize Many of Your Staff & Residents May Be Survivors of Sexual Violence
- ▶ Recognize Trauma Responses (Staff & Residents)

# Resources

- ❑ National Institute on Aging
  - <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/sexuality-and-intimacy-older-adults>
  - <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/changes-intimacy-and-sexuality-alzheimers-disease>
- ❑ SAGE: Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders
  - <https://www.sageusa.org>
- ❑ Health in Aging (Tip Sheet)
  - <https://www.healthinaging.org/tools-and-tips/tip-sheet-safe-sex-older-adults>
- ❑ Sample Facility Policy re: Sexual Expression Among Residents
  - <https://www.riverspringliving.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Sexual-Expression-Policy-1-17.pdf>

# Resources Continued

- ❑ Long Term Care Ombudsman: Sexual Expression Policy Development: A Guide for Long-Term Care Facilities and Assisted Living Programs
  - <https://ltcombudsman.org/uploads/files/issues/sexual-policy-development.pdf>
- ❑ Addressing Sexuality in Long-Term Care: A Person-Centered Approach to Intimacy & Dementia
  - <https://nursinghomehelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Hard-to-Love.pdf>
- ❑ Five Part Film Series on Sexuality, Intimacy, and Dementia in Residential Care Settings
  - <https://terranova.org/film-catalog/sexuality-intimacy-and-dementia-in-residential-care-settings/>
- ❑ Ethics & Intimate Sexual Activity in Long-Term Care – A Case & Commentary from the American Medical Association Journal of Ethics
  - <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/ethics-and-intimate-sexual-activity-long-term-care/2017-07>



# References

1. Lindau, S. T., Schumm, L. P., Laumann, E. O., Levinson, W., O'Muircheartaigh, C. A., & Waite, L. J. (2007). A study of sexuality and health among older adults in the US. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 357(8), 762-774. <https://doi:10.1056/NEJMoa067423>
2. Gianotten, W. L., Alley, J. C., & Diamon, L. M. (2021). The health benefits of sexual expression. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 33(4), 478-493. <https://doi://10.1080/19317611.2021.1966564>
3. Smith, L., Yang, L., Veribese, N., Soysal, P., Stubbs, B., & Jackson, S. E. (2019). Sexual activity is associated with greater enjoyment of life in older adults. *Sexual Medicine*, 7, 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esxm.2018.11.001>



For more information contact Kimberly  
Cassie, PhD., MSSW, MA  
[kmccassie@ou.edu](mailto:kmccassie@ou.edu)