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## Combating Long-Term Care Isolation through Healing Touch

Veronica J. Butts

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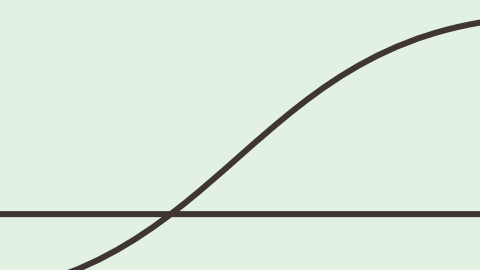
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# Combating Long-Term Care Isolation through Healing Touch

Veronica Butts, PharmD Candidate 2025



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# Introduction

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# Isolation and Lack of Compassionate Touch in Long-Term Care

**Loneliness**— defined as feelings of disconnectedness, isolation, lack of belonging that can be a physical and/or psychological state

This stems into the **social isolation** that is too easily seen in Long-Term Care facilities

- Disconnected from family members
- Taken away from familiarity
- Some conditions make affect cognitive impairment (social withdrawal)

Lack of **compassionate touch** and physical human interaction

- Touch is something humans naturally crave
  - Can be incredibly healing (other cultures focus on the importance)
  - Difference between loving touch and interactions with providers
-

# Personal Connection

Why this topic and population?

- Vancrest Geriatric Elective IPPE Experience
- Elderly grandparents
- Strong desire to work in geriatric pharmacy
- Emotional impact

Why this type of event?

- Hands-on impact
- Directly interacting with patients
- First-hand account of results and feedback of response



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# Importance

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# Why is this topic important for Pharmacists and Providers?



## Different Forms of Healing

The impact of compassionate touch and human interaction is not as understood as medications and surgeries



## Improve Patient-Centered Care

Pharmacists and providers must be prepared to counsel and array of different populations—don't necessarily have to specialize



## Enhance Patient Outcomes

This deeper understanding of health and other populations will allow providers to develop trusting relationships with the patient and improve health outcomes

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# Research

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# Impact of Isolation

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# Systematic Review on Effects of Loneliness + Social Isolation on Older Adults in Long Term Care<sup>1</sup>

**What:** systematic review conducted by the Department of Gerontology in Boston, MA

**Objective:** to pool together literature regarding impact of loneliness and isolation in long term care

**How:** incorporation of 4 cohorts, 19 cross-sectional, 3 mixed-method, and 5 qualitative studies to analyze together

**Results:** consistent in discovering impact loneliness has on physical and psychological state (ex worsening conditions + depression)

**Conclusions:** loneliness is common in long term care settings and is found to have a link with health outcomes including frailty, suicidal risk, and depression

**Why is This Relevant:** This article indicated the dire spread and impact of loneliness in long term care settings and on worsening health outcomes of patients. It previews the need for interventions to help prevent these adverse outcomes and combat the manifestation of intense loneliness and isolation in these settings.

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# Influences of Loneliness on Older Adults: A Meta-Analysis<sup>2</sup>

**What:** meta-analysis with combined authors from Germany and America

**Objective:** to identify the impacts on loneliness including age, social networks, gender, socioeconomic status, and competence

**How:** inclusion of 129 studies on the association of loneliness with age, gender, SES, competence

**Results:** in each of the categories, there were greater degrees of loneliness

**Conclusion:** This means that with increased age, decreased competence, and lack of social networks, loneliness will increase

**Why is this Relevant:** This was a great article to show the influences of loneliness and how the geriatric population in long term care facilities tend to have most of these characteristics that put them more at risk for developing intense loneliness and a sense of isolation.

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# Benefits of Compassionate Touch

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# Therapeutic Touch: Compassionate Touch for Persons with Dementia: A pilot review<sup>3</sup>

**What:** pilot review surrounding therapeutic touch and its impact on dementia in Austria

**Objective:** to see how therapeutic touch can lessen agitated behavior and bring temporary relief in cases of indirect pain

**How:** various studies compiled together with TT being utilized as a nursing intervention approach

**Results:** combined interventions showed improvement when utilized in patients with advanced dementia

**Conclusion:** therapeutic touch shows the possibility of aiding in communicating with patients who cannot be reached verbally

**Why is it Relevant:** This study is relevant because it previews the theme of therapeutic touch and its proven clinical benefit. This article surfaces the idea of improving patients “sense of well-being” through personal attention and care when given this therapeutic and compassionate touch which can have instrumental health benefits.

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# The Use of Human Touch to Improve the Well-Being of Older Adults<sup>4</sup>

**What:** holistic nursing intervention from Saint Clare's Health Services

**Objective:** this article sought to explore the research behind the benefits of healing touch on older adults

**How:** review of touch with confused older adults; palliative nursing touch with older adults;

**Results:** in all the different aspects that were studied, human touch is seen to have potential benefit

**Conclusion:** some of the recorded benefits of human touch include improving confusional symptoms, alleviating pain, and providing comfort

**Why is it Relevant:** This article is relevant because it dives deeper into the specific impacts of healing touch and its impact on older patients. It even surfaces the connotations associated with healing touch as "taboo" or "nontraditional," emphasizing the need for more studies and implementation.

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# Application



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# Spa Event

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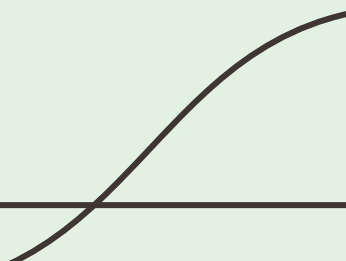
# Why and How to go about it?

Wanted to address **both** major problems: social isolation and lack of compassionate touch

## How to address the **social isolation**

- Bring together the women in the nursing home
- Have the women mingle with the volunteers
- Create a sense of community

## How to address the **compassionate touch**

- Applying makeup to each of the residents
  - Hand massages
  - Facials
  - Nail painting
  - Taking time to physically be present and interact with the patients
- 

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# Training & Coordination

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# Before the Event:

## Coordination with Vancrest

Choose a date  
and time for the  
residents

## Event

## Execution

Ensure the program  
ran smoothly and  
efficiently

01

## Training Session

Volunteers from  
Spring Geriatric  
IPPE group

02

03

## Materials and Methods

Determine supplies  
needed and  
sequence of events

04



# Event Details

01

## Nail Painting

- nail buffing
- nail filing
- nail painting
- stickers/designs

02

## Makeup

- simple makeup look
- blush, lipstick, eyeshadow
- sensitive skin: brushes only

03

## Facial Care

- cucumber eye mask
- hot towel for face
- lavender oil
- temple rubs

04

## Hand Massages

- residents pick lotion
- hand massages
- diffusers and warm towels for hands

05

## Hair Styling

- hair brushing
- hair curling
- hair blowouts
- clips/braids/barretts

06

## Aromatherapy

- throughout stations
- diffusers with lavender oil
- sparkling beverages for residents

# Conclusion

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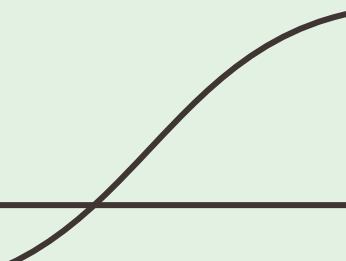
# Results of the Spa Event

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# Station Set Up

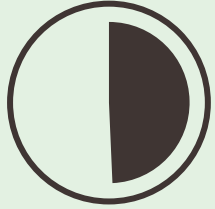






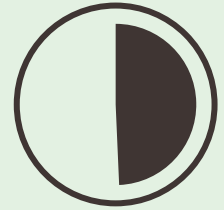


## Event Success

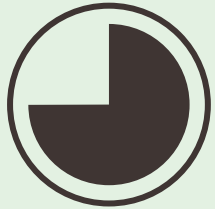


**50% Very  
Successful**  
(5/5)

**50%  
Successful**  
(4/5)

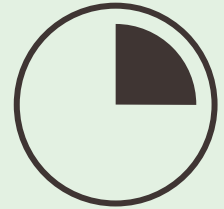


## Future Continuation of Event

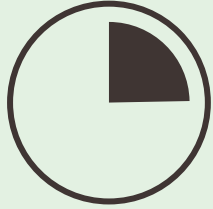


**75%  
Undeniably**  
(5/5)

**25%  
Agree**  
(4/5)

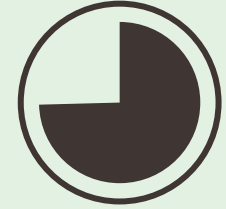


## Combating Isolation

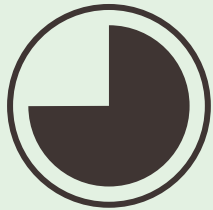


**25% Very  
Successful**  
(5/5)

**75%**  
**Successful**  
(4/5)

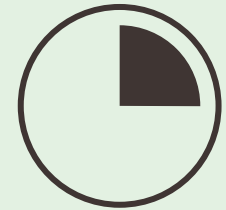


## Incorporation of Compassionate Touch



**75% Very  
Successful**  
(5/5)

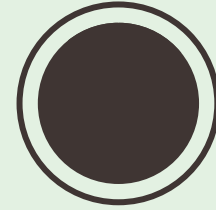
**25%**  
**Successful**  
(4/5)



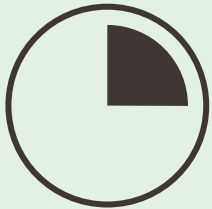


# Positive Change in Demeanor

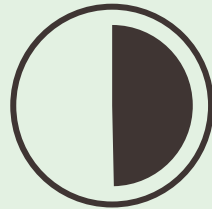
100% Very  
Successful  
(5/5)



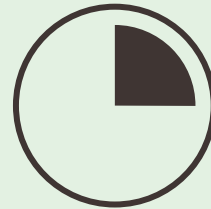
# Most Impactful Event



25% Hair  
Styling



50% Hand  
Massage



25% Makeup  
Station

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# Measuring the Impact

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# Impact on the Residents

“The residents absolutely loved it and I think the **makeup and hair section** was a big hit! The ladies loved that they could take a little lipstick with them to go as well!”

“This was an amazing event. I’ve been to a lot of events at vancrest through IPPEs and SLIPPEs but this one was **very unique** and the residents loved it!!! I would definitely participate if it were to be a continued event and I know the residents would as well!!”

“I think the residents loved this event. The way they were so excited and wanted to **try all the stations** was amazing!”

“Really nice job putting it together! I know the seniors loved it!!”

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# Connection to Literature

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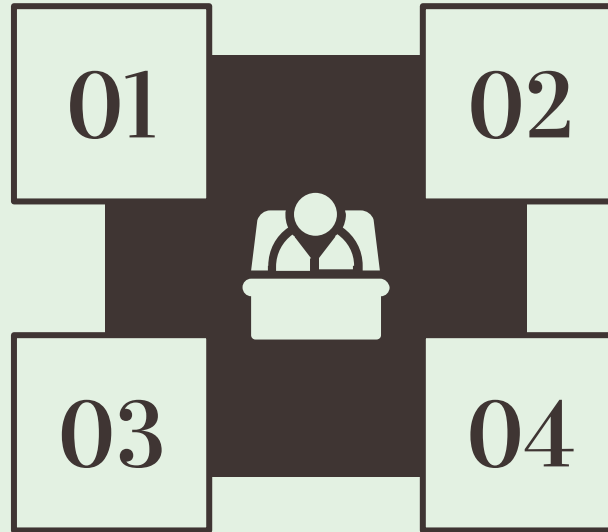
# How Does This Connect?

## Isolation

- impacts morale
- health outcomes
- development of mood disorders

## Touch

- difference between medical touch and human touch
- power of human interaction
- enhance outcomes



## Geriatric

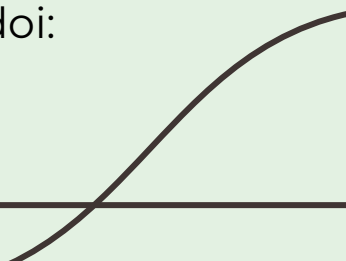
- increased number of health conditions
- removed from family
- loss of physical independence

## Future

- continues to be researched
- hoping to bring awareness to issue
- programs + outreach
- widespread concern

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# References

1. Lapane KL, Lim E, McPhillips E, Barooah A, Yuan Y, Dube CE. Health effects of loneliness and social isolation in older adults living in congregate long term care settings: A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative evidence. *Arch Gerontol Geriatr*. 2022 Sep-Oct;102:104728. doi: 10.1016/j.archger.2022.104728. Epub 2022 May 13. PMID: 35597183.
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  3. Ploner-Grissmann, HM. Therapeutic Touch® - Compassionate touch for persons with dementia: A pilot review. *Journal of alternative medicine research*. 2018;10;(3):211-3.
  4. Bush E. The use of human touch to improve the well-being of older adults. A holistic nursing intervention. *J Holist Nurs*. 2001 Sep;19(3):256-70. doi: 10.1177/0898010101900306. PMID: 11847871.
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# Questions?

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A Special Thanks to my Preceptor, **Dr. Kelly Kroustos**