



COVID-19, Frailty, and Long-term Care: Implication for Policy and Practice

COVID-19 has had a detrimental effect on those in long-term care facilities. This is especially due to varying levels of frailty and chronic conditions. Frailty is defined as the combination of functional and health problems that cause elderly patients to be more vulnerable to poor health outcomes. Due to the wide range of frailty and chronic conditions seen in these settings it has been challenging to identify when patients develop COVID-19 as they present atypically. Limiting visitors such as friends, family and peers in an attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has also led to later identification of unwell residents. This group may have been able to identify that something is “off”, or they may have seen early signs of illness as they know individual residents on a more personal level that long-term care facility workers may. Limited resources in these facilities have resulted in employees being unable to take paid sick leave from work which has contributed to further infection spread. The full impact COVID-19 has had on long-term care facilities is unknown due to lack of proper reporting and the wide variety of different types of long-term care facilities.

I think this article does a great job of emphasizing that the impact COVID-19 has had on long-term care facilities is due to factors on individual, friend, family, institutional, community, and contextual policy levels. While safety is the top priority in these facilities, drastic measures that may initially seem the safest options may be unintentionally causing harm. This is well seen in limiting the interactions that residents may have with family and friends. Additionally, for helpful and validated policies to be developed to promote optimal resident safety, applicable and a greater quantity of data must be collected and analyzed. The wide variety of long-term care facilities must be taken into account throughout the development of these policies, and simply measuring the number of patients with COVID-19 must be recognized as not enough. These patients are influenced by far more factors, such as co-morbidities, increasing frailty, as well as changes in mental status and long-term goals. These factors must be taken into account when developing future policies to allow for more accurate results and a stronger impact.

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