

2nd International Conference on

Clinical Psychiatry and Mental Health

December 12-13, 2023 | Paris, France

Volume: 14

Stress, Mental Health, and Chronic Illness: The Missing Piece in Patient Care

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Quality of life is often significantly impacted with individuals who have chronic physical health issues. Individuals with chronic illnesses not only face general life worries, but they are often forced to endure specific stressors, caused by symptoms of their chronic illness, that directly impact their ability to care for themselves and their ability to engage in their life activities on a daily basis, which, ultimately, significantly impact their overall quality of life. The social and economic conditions of where individuals age, live, work, learn, and play, also known as social determinants of health (SDOH), are not only significant contributing factors for an individual's, a community's, and a population's health but are also more substantial influencers to health outcomes than the direct clinical care provided. A common focus, within health care and with health care providers, is on access to care; however, the other areas of an individual's life, the SDOH, much like mental health, are not necessarily visible and, thus, are most often ignored despite the strong impact they have on a person's health status. With the co-occurrence of the high prevalence of mental health symptoms amongst individuals with chronic illness and general as well as disease-specific SDOH issues, it is vital that psychosocial stressors and mental health issues are identified, discussed, and incorporated into the care that is given to patients in order to assist with maintaining an optimal level of quality of life for these patients.

Biography

Nancy Lazar is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) with over 30 years of experience. She received her Bachelor of Art degree from the University of Texas at Austin and a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Southern California. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Social Work from the University of Southern California. She specializes in managing mental health in the midst of chronic illness. She is a published author, with her most recent article What is the best approach for supporting a scleroderma patient? in the journal Rheumatic Disease Clinics of North America.