The Use of iPads to Reduce Loneliness and Foster a Sense of Community in Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

It is projected that by 2050, 83.7 million people in the United States will be 65 years of age or older (Ortman, & Velkoff, 2014). And, as the numbers of older adults continues to increase, these individuals may experience loneliness, reduced mobility, health decline or limited income (Bernard, 2013; Graham, 2012, UNFPA, 2012)). Numerous studies have documented that using that information and communication technologies like computers and mobile devices connected to the Internet have positive effects on the well-being of the older adults (Delello & McWhorter, 2015; Dinham, 2012).

This mixed-methods case study was conducted in the fall of 2014 with two cohorts of older adults residing at senior living centers in the Southwestern United States. The case study explored whether the use of iPads would decrease loneliness in older adults. The research project sought to answer the following questions: 1) How can iPad technology be utilized to reduce loneliness in senior citizens? 2) How did iPad technology facilitate a sense of community among the participants?

Participants were at least 65 years of age and had an interest learning more about iPad technology. Participants were loaned an iPad in exchange for their participation during the 10 week study. Seniors learned basic technology use and Internet, email, photo sharing, social media platforms videoconferencing technologies health information, and how to use online libraries The city library provided library cards for electronic books (eBooks). Health information was delivered by senior level community health nursing students through the use of The National Institute on Aging Toolkit, Helping Older Adults Search for Health Information Online (NIH, 2013).
Approximately 43 people indicated an interest in participating in the study and of these, 37 consented to the study. The first cohort consisted of 17 residents (3 males/14 females) residing in independent living apartments within a senior retirement community and the second included eight residents (5 males/3 females) from two sets of apartments maintained by the Salvation Army.

A pre-experience and summative questionnaire was used to gather information regarding the age, gender, race, education, and marital status of the participants. In addition, The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Revised Loneliness Scale (version 3) (UCLA RLS; Russell, 1996). A final evaluation report completed by each center director and student reflections were gathered from senior nursing students.

The data analysis for the study was based upon the examination of the questionnaires, qualitative feedback from directors, nursing student journals, and service-learning student reflection papers. The data analysis used descriptive techniques and SPSS (version 12) was used to analyze internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the UCLA RLS data. The analysis included between groups effects as well as within subject effects. A repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether any change in loneliness resulted from the iPad intervention.

No handouts were provided for this presentation:

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