Understanding Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) in a Nursing Facility

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MDD, or clinical depression, is more than feeling sad or having a bad day. It is a serious mental illness that requires understanding, compassion, and medical care. When a resident is exhibiting depressive symptoms, staff should consider making a referral for a comprehensive assessment.



A qualified clinician should review the resident's history and administer the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2 and PHQ-9). Residents who screen positive on the PHQ-2 should be further assessed using the PHQ-9. The presence of depressive symptoms should be considered when developing the resident's individualized care plan.

How Is MDD Diagnosed?

MDD is diagnosed when there is/are:

- A persistently low or depressed mood.
- Decreased interest in pleasurable activities.
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness.





- Lack of energy.
- Poor concentration.
- Appetite changes.
- Low energy.
- Sleep disturbances.
- Thoughts of death/suicidal thoughts.

Five of the above-mentioned symptoms must be present every day, nearly all day, for at least two weeks. One of the symptoms must be a depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities.

Symptoms of MDD that staff may observe in a resident are as follows:



Mood	Depressed, sad, irritable, loss of interest, and loss of pleasure in daily activities.
Physical	Visibly slowed down or agitated, extreme fatigue, and lack of energy.
Behavioral	Withdrawal and isolation; no desire to talk, interact, and/or socialize; decreased motivation.
Thinking	Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt; inability to think, remember, or concentrate.
Senses	Hypersensitive to noise, light, and stress.

Potential Situations that May Lead to Depressive Episodes in Residents Are:

- Admission to a nursing facility.
- Chronic illness or injury.
- Chronic or acute pain that is not well-controlled.
- Loss of independence and personal autonomy.
- Inactivity.
- Social isolation and loneliness.
- Separation from family and friends.
- Decline in functional competence.
- Grief and loss.
- Processing or accepting the end of life.

How Is MDD Treated?

With early and consistent treatment, depressive symptoms can improve, helping residents maintain or improve their daily functioning and quality of life. Nursing facility staff can help by providing person-centered care using the following interventions, including:

- Psychotherapy, including individual, group, family, or peer support.
- Medication management as identified by members of the resident care team.
- Encouraging residents to participate in activities, classes, and social events of choice.
- Planning regular family and social visits for residents to help maintain social connections.



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