Depression, Loneliness Associated With Increased Hospitalization Risk After COVID-19

Women who reported chronic depression before the pandemic were 72% more likely to be hospitalized after COVID-19 diagnosis.

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People who reported in a survey that they felt worried, depressed or lonely had a greater chance of being hospitalized after a COVID-19 diagnosis, suggests a study funded by the National Institutes of Health. The study, which analyzed survey data from more than 54,000 female nurses and their offspring, was conducted by Andrea L. Roberts, PhD, of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, and colleagues. It appears in Psychological Medicine.

Between April 2020 and April 2021, slightly more than 3,600 study participants tested positive for SAR-CoV-2 infection. Those who reported chronic (long-term) depression before the pandemic were 72% more likely to be hospitalized after their diagnosis for COVID-19. Those who scored high on likely indicators of depression (probable depression) when they began the study were 81% more likely to be hospitalized than those who did not. Being very worried about COVID-19 was associated with a 79% increase in risk for hospitalization. Moreover, those who reported persistent feelings of loneliness were 81% more likely to be hospitalized than those who did not. Feelings of anxiety and stress were not associated with a higher risk for hospitalization.

The authors said their findings suggest that psychological risk factors may increase hospitalization risk as much as physical risk factors, such as high cholesterol and hypertension. They called for additional research to determine if treatment to reduce depression and other forms of psychological distress, in addition to standard treatments, might reduce the severity of COVID-19.

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