

Social Mobility and Chronic Pain

The Problem: Social Isolation

Social isolation is described as an objective state — how many others are in contact with the person, and how physically separated they are. Social isolation refers to those who have little or almost no contact with, or relationship to other people. Some of the negative impacts of social isolation on individuals include: depression, reduced sleep, and increased stress and anxiety. Research also links increases in social isolation with higher and earlier rates of morbidity.

People with chronic pain are among those most vulnerable to social isolation. Uncertainty over when pain will flare up, the debilitating effects of the pain when it does occur, and mobility problems make it difficult for people with chronic pain to participate fully in society. Activities that would be trivial for people without chronic pain, such as getting to a doctor's appointment, can be overwhelming to arrange: will the bus be too crowded to sit comfortably or should I take a taxi? How far will I be able to walk?

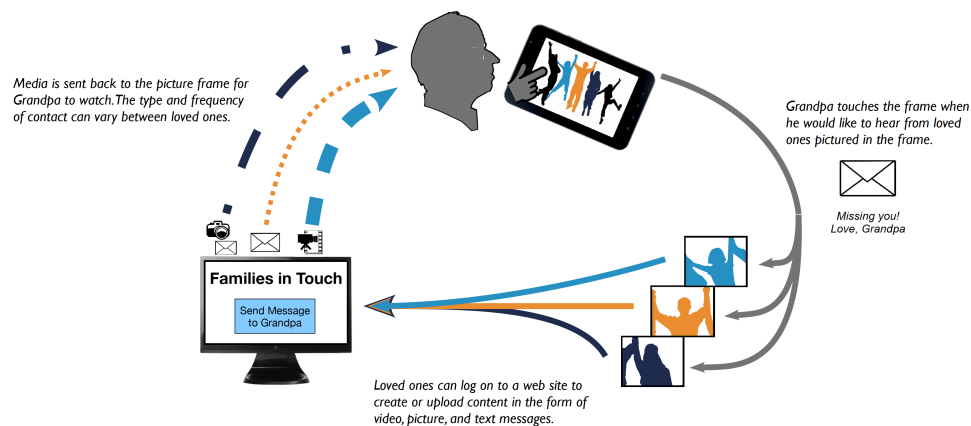
Social Media: A Solution?

Social media (e.g., IM, email, Twitter, Facebook, Google +, etc.) can help alleviate social isolation. Being able to reach others for support, to find information, to get assistance or just to connect with friends and family can be transforming. Even being able to contact a friend for the "in between times", when there is too much pain to go out but you would still like someone to come over to watch a movie.

However, there are difficulties that need to be overcome. Traditional means of connecting through social media can often be difficult to use for people with chronic pain. Simple controls and interfaces are needed.

Prototype

The Pain Lab is collaborating with the Technologies for Aging Gracefully (TAG) Lab at the University of Toronto on prototypes of social media solutions for people with chronic pain and/or age-related ability issues. Here is one example of a simplified social media solution.



— Jessica David, TAGLab, University of Toronto

For more information

www.confrontingpain.com
www.taglab.utoronto.ca