

## League Focuses on Mental Health and Aging

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"Mental health problems are not a normal part of aging." That's the motto for the Older Women's League. But for at least a third of patients in nursing homes, it's a reality. In fact, depression affects between 30 and 50 percent of long-term nursing care patients.

Tuesday the league put together a training session for certified nursing assistants. "All these CNAs can come into contact with people with depression every day. And it's not as easy as someone telling someone to snap out of it," said Sue Drumm of the Jefferson Area Board for Aging.

Added Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, who runs training sessions across the country: "When aides get certified, they really get certified in the physical aspects of care and not the emotional or personal, and the biggest issue an institution has is how do you make a patient a person again?"

This time of year is especially hard on patients. "The holidays really can be a signal time for people recognizing their own sense of depression and isolation, loneliness and withdrawal," said Lichtenberg.

One simple tool for nurses, aides, and family members is asking simple questions about the patient's mood. But there's plenty more you can do for your patient or loved one.

"It's very simple activities, such as talking to them about things that they liked when they were younger, what they did in their career, asking them about their family," said Ashley Carson, executive director of the Older Women's League.

Several of the people at Tuesday's training session were actually trainers. Organizers hope they'll take what they learned and educate all the nursing assistants they come in contact with.

**Reported by Tracy Clemons**