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Loneliness 'as bad for health as a chronic long-term condition'

Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, Chair of the Royal College of GPs, will today talk about the older patients who are seeing their GP because they are lonely. Her speech at the College's Annual Primary Care Conference will highlight the impact of social isolation, and the inevitable toll this has on the NHS and the health of patients.

Laura Alcock-Ferguson, Executive Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness, said:

"Professor Stokes-Lampard is right to raise the issue of loneliness as a serious health issue that deserves serious attention. The health impacts of loneliness can be devastating; it is worse for you than obesity, and as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Chronic loneliness is cutting lives short, and the problem is growing. We fully support the call for GPs needing time to care.

"Our recent research with the LSE found that for every £1 spent on tackling loneliness, up to £3 can be saved in health costs – and GPs can play a huge part in identifying the older people who need help. We want all GPs to be able to spot the signs of loneliness, and would encourage GP surgeries - where possible - to link up with local services that tackle loneliness. We also need commissioners to fund the early interventions and services that will stop lonely people needing to go see their GPs in the first place. The health and economic benefits for tackling loneliness in older people are clear. Now, we need action."