

GNEM SYMPOSIUM SPEAKER SERIES

presented by The Neuromuscular Disease Foundation

"Exploring Intimacy & Physical Connection for GNEM Patients and their Partners"



**Dr. Gretchen
Kubacky**



with Carol Gelbard, LCSW
NDF Emotional Wellness Director

Friday July 31, 2020
12pm PDT/3pm EDT



**NEUROMUSCULAR
DISEASE FOUNDATION**



Speaker Series #73120

**Gretchen Kubacky, Psy.D., Health Psychologist
With Carol Gelbard, LCSW**

**Exploring Intimacy and Physical Connection for
GNEM Patients and Their Partners**



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Introduction

1. How Dr. Kubacky works with NDM
2. Providing resources for patient support, recommendations for mental health practice, and context for relational thriving, even in the midst of crisis
3. Opening up creative possibilities for intimacy while living with progressive disability, crisis, and relational complications

Physical
Emotional
And Beyond...



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- **Intimacy is for Everyone**
- All people need physical contact, communication, and intimacy for well-being
- We all have the ability to please others
- Separating caregiving and intimacy concerns
 - - How do you stay romantically coupled?
 - Valuing connection
 - Only one definition matters - yours



Ability, Disability, and Creativity

Sexual technique, needs, and limitations change through the lifespan of all people

Aging, menopause, ED, pregnancy, pain, etc.

Managing expectations is key

Creating spontaneity when you need a plan

Corresponding with disease progression

Standing, sitting, reclining

Caressing without hands

Mixed position hugs

Amplifying small gestures



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Intimacy Building

- Intimacy is a continuous conversation between two or more people
 - Sexuality is unique to romantic relationships
 - Relationship building
 - Relationship maintaining
 - Creative
 - Emotional
 - Intentional



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- **Intimacy is Much More Than Sex Acts**
- Thinking about intimacy as:
 - Tone
 - Gesture
 - Flirtation
 - Insinuation
 - Promise
 - Expectation



- **Anticipation and Mental Play are Key Components of a Novel and Creative Intimate Relationship**

- Mind/imagination as a tool for intimacy and sexuality
- Talking builds interest, appetite, and intrigue
- Maintaining authenticity

- *The Dark Side of Intimacy and Sexuality*

- Agency over one's own body
- Consent
- Boundaries
- Addressing shame



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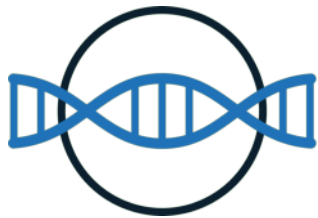
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- **Self-Perpetuating Intimacy**
- Amplification of intimacy through:
 - Light touch/touch with tools
 - Eyes
 - Tone of voice
 - Choice of words
 - Notes/messages
 - Compliments
 - “Your song” and other music
 - Sharing of stories, history, and fantasies



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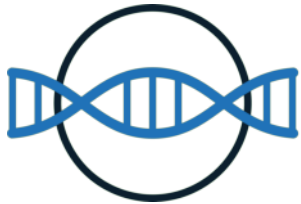
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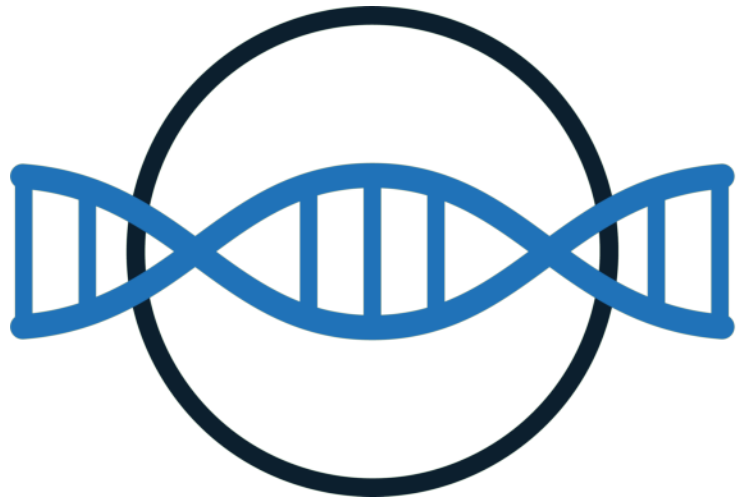
**Exploring Intimacy & Physical Connection for
GNEM Patients and their Partners**

- **Key Takeaways:**
- Intimacy is for everyone
- Intimacy is more than sex
- Intimacy is a continuous conversation between two or more people
- Sexual technique, needs, and limitations change through the lifespan of all people
- Creating accommodations together builds intimacy
- Anticipation and mental play are key components of intimacy.
- Continuing the education and exploration



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