

HUMANITARIAN HEALTH CONFERENCE

EQUIP · CONNECT · GO

# The Power of Connection

*Every encounter carries the seed of a lifelong impact.*



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INMED-HHC · 2026

# Disclosure of Relevant Financial Relationships

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Speaker

**Monica Rojas, MD**

*No relevant financial relationships with ineligible companies to disclose.*

# Three movements. One mission.

*The hinge between preparation and action.*



**EQUIP**

*Prepare. Train. Be ready.*



**CONNECT**

*See people. Build trust. Stay.*



**GO**

*Move. Serve. Bring hope.*

↑ *My focus today*

W E L C O M E

# Before I begin...

*Look at the person beside you. Smile.*

That tiny moment — a glance, a smile, a name remembered — is exactly what I want to talk about for the next thirty minutes.



# Connection is not networking.

*It is the willingness to truly see another person, and to be seen.*



## PRESENCE

Being fully there. Phone down. Eyes up. Listening more than speaking.



## CARE

Genuine interest in the other person's story — not what they can do for you.



## TIME

The seed of a connection is small. Its fruit can take decades to ripen.

“

Nobody cares how much you know  
*until they know how much you care.*

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Often attributed to Theodore Roosevelt

*“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

**— Galatians 6:2**

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*Connection is not an add-on to humanitarian work. It is the work. To carry another’s burden, we must first draw close enough to feel its weight.*



B U T I T ' S N O T J U S T S C R I P T U R E

# Science says the same thing.

*Decades of research keep arriving at the same conclusion: the quality of our relationships shapes how long we live, how well we heal, and how fully we flourish.*

**50%**

increased likelihood of survival for people with strong social ties (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010)

**85 yrs**

the Harvard Study of Adult Development: relationships are the #1 predictor of long-term health

**1 in 6**

people worldwide affected by loneliness — a public-health crisis (WHO, 2025)

T H E L O N G E S T S T U D Y O F H A P P I N E S S E V E R C O N D U C T E D

# Harvard Study of Adult Development

*Begun in 1938. Still running. Over 700 participants followed for more than 85 years.*

*“The people who were the most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80.”*

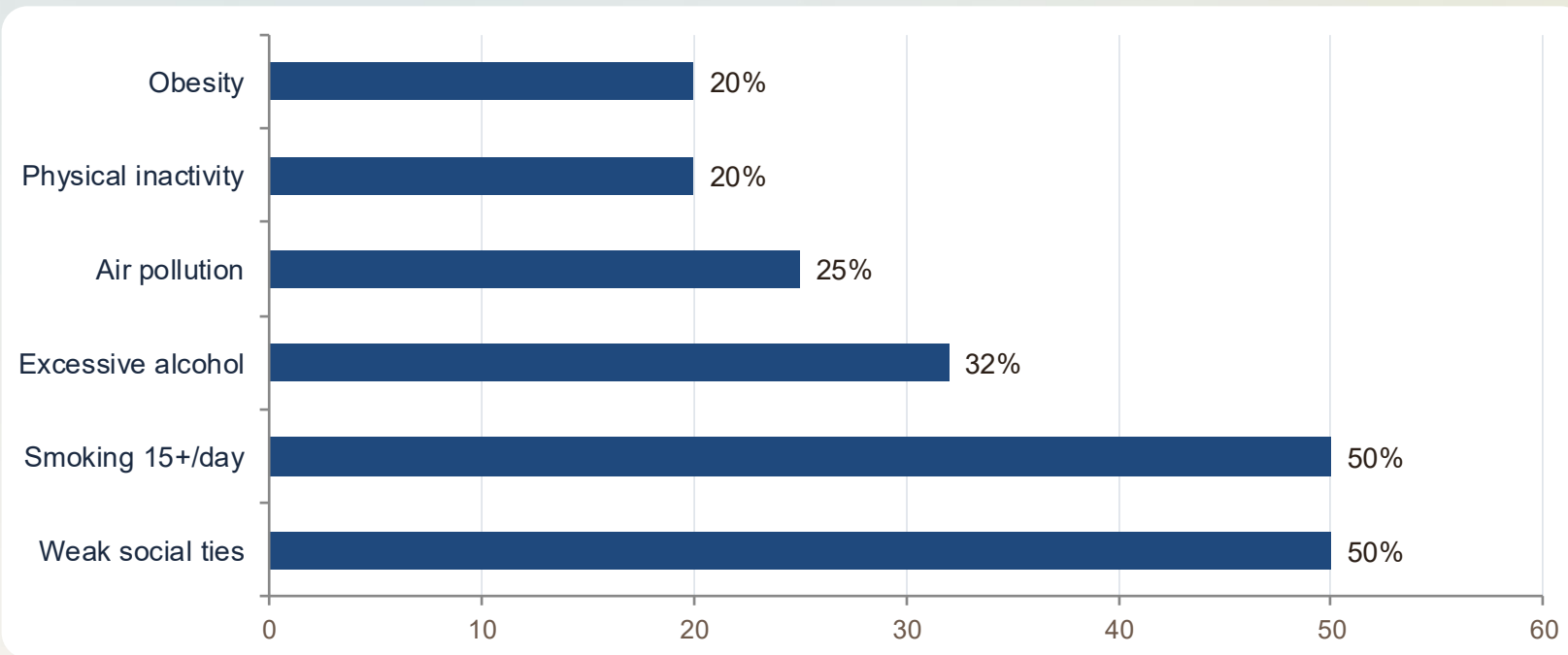
Good relationships — not wealth, not fame, not genetics — were the strongest predictor of healthy aging and longevity.

## WHAT MATTERED MOST

- Warmth of childhood relationships
- Quality (not quantity) of friendships
- Feeling truly able to count on someone
- Community ties beyond family

# Loneliness is as deadly as smoking.

Holt-Lunstad and colleagues reviewed 148 studies covering more than 308,000 participants.



*Lack of social connection raises the risk of early death by roughly the same amount as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day.*

WHO RECOGNIZES IT AS A GLOBAL HEALTH PRIORITY

# A silent epidemic — and an opportunity.

*WHO Commission on Social Connection · 2025 Flagship Report*

**871,000**

deaths per year linked to  
loneliness  
(roughly 100 every hour)

**+30%**

increased risk of cardiovascular  
disease  
from social isolation

**20.9%**

of adolescents aged 13–17 report  
loneliness — the highest of any  
age group

**1 in 3**

older adults globally are  
socially isolated

THE NUMBERS TELL US WHY.

# Now let me tell you the stories.

*Three encounters. Three decades. One thread.*



# A connection that came back 30 years later.



THEN

*7 years old meets a nice lady, a missionary...*



YEARS LATER

*30 years later, I got to take 2 medical students to Africa*



STORY · TWO

THEN

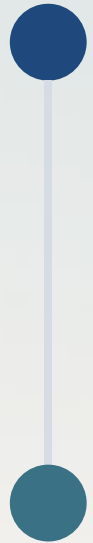
*Jose Carlos Vela, a high school friend ...*

YEARS LATER

*His wife, Mariana, a PT in Mexico.*



STORY · THREE



“

People will forget what you said.

People will forget what you did.






*But people will never forget how you  
made them feel.*

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— Maya Angelou

S O H O W D O W E C O N N E C T ?

# Five small practices - Lifetime impact

-  **1 LEARN THE NAME** And use it. A name is the shortest love letter we know.
-  **2 ASK ONE MORE QUESTION** Then actually listen to the answer. Silence is a gift.
-  **3 GIVE TWO MINUTES** Not your whole day — just the next two minutes, fully.
-  **4 FOLLOW UP** The text you almost didn't send is often the one that mattered.
-  **5 REMEMBER WHY** Behind every chart and clinic is a person who needs to be seen.

# Connection is the hinge.

*You can be the most equipped clinician in the room and never change a life if you never close the distance.*

*You can go anywhere in the world and accomplish nothing of lasting value if you never connect.*

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**Today, before you GO — CONNECT**

T H A N K   Y O U

# *Let's connect.*

## References

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