

## **Reminiscence Therapy for the Elderly**

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January 2023

Virtual reality (VR) headsets are not just for video games. Dr. Jeremy Bailenson, the director of Stanford University's virtual human interaction lab has been utilizing the devices as part of an effort to address loneliness and anxiety for those suffering with dementia.

A recent Times article featured Dr. Bailenson and his work with the company MyndVR, centered around "reminiscence therapy" – which "includes activities such as viewing childhood pictures or listening to favourite music — can boost someone's mood, and VR is being used to provide a more immersive experience."<sup>1</sup> Using the technology – either alone or in groups – users are able to revisit places where they may have lived or visited in the past.

As opposed to cell phones, VR headsets are comparatively intuitive for seniors. As Bailenson noted, "[i]f you want to look at an object, you simply turn your head the same way you would in the real world. If you want to get closer to an object, you move your chair closer to that object and it gets bigger."<sup>2</sup> And, although some have experienced motion sickness or headaches, he is quite optimistic about the clinical usefulness of the technology, noting the at the question is more about the type of content to give patients that is clinically valid and that is going to accelerate care and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

### **MyndVR**

On its website, Plano, Texas-based MyndVR describes itself as a "VR-based digital therapeutics platform offering a vast library of immersive experiences designed to address senior health across the continuum of care, improving the lives of older adults and those who care for them."<sup>4</sup> Based on data collected over 450 VR Sessions, the company draws attention to the following results<sup>5</sup>:

- 92% felt relief of stress and anxiety
- 66% experienced reduction in pain intensity
- 96% enjoyed the experience and would recommend to other users

The market for VR in medicine has been fairly small, but it is a high growth area. With only a \$2.7 billion piece of this market in 2020, a recent market research report estimates that between 2021 and 2026, the market for VR in healthcare will grow nearly 35% annually, swelling to more than \$40 billion by the end of that time.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Southern, Keiran. "Care home residents with dementia use VR to see off anxiety". The Times. January 20 2023. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/us-care-home-residents-take-a-virtual-walk-down-memory-lane-7mshjd9hp>. Accessed on January 27, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> MyndVR Website. Homepage. Available at: <https://www.myndvr.com/>. Accessed on January 27, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Landi, Heather. "Startup MyndVR inks partnership to expand virtual reality solutions for seniors". Fierce Healthcare. February 17, 2022. Available at: <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/health-tech/startup-myndvr-inks-partnership-expand-virtual-reality-solutions-seniors>. Accessed on January 27, 2023.

Chris Brickler, CEO and co-founder of MyndVR explains in an interview with Fierce Healthcare that the company is "providing digital health and happiness to this booming audience of older adults using VR, ...While VR companies to date have focused on younger audiences, there is an opportunity to leverage the tech to engage a dynamic aging population."<sup>7</sup>

Having recently established a partnership with Select Rehabilitation – a provider of rehabilitation services employing 17,000 therapists across the country – the company is expanding its VR solution to post-acute care. The way this works is that VR programs simulate rooms in a home, like a kitchen or garage, to help users with activities of daily living. This kind of approach can help to reduce costs at senior living facilities that might otherwise need to build such kinds of facilities. Instead, this can all be done in a virtual space.

This is a new frontier in senior care, but MyndVR is not alone. There is growing competition from other companies. One of these companies is Massachusetts-based Rendever, which apparently already has more than 400 enterprise clients.<sup>8</sup>

Going forward, it will be important for this sort of treatment to receive FDA designations and recognition of these services by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. This would seem very likely as the services gain traction and offer viable solutions with compelling cost savings.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.