

Go-To Apps for Memory Care Therapists

For long-term caregivers whose work focuses on physical therapy or speech pathology, the list of tools and resources is extensive. For those caregivers who work in assisted living memory care, however, every day poses new challenges as the mechanisms for diseases like Alzheimer's are still not fully understood.

Restoring Cognitive Health

While researchers do not have a full understanding of the causes of dementia and Alzheimer's, some studies have provided evidence that activities like brain games, puzzles and crosswords may actually help slow the progression of dementia and, for those not genetically predisposed, prevent it.

Medical researchers also continue to work to improve the quality of life for those already suffering from dementia, and they have revealed promising ways to mitigate many of the unpleasant effects, and in some cases, to slow down the progression of the disease.

For example, in 2018 the journal *Gerontologist* published research on established non-pharmacological approaches to treat behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSDs). The study found that sensory practices like aromatherapy, massage, multi-sensory stimulation and bright light therapy, as well as psychosocial practices such as validation, reminiscence, music and pet therapy may all contribute to continued cognitive health.

Some of the most promising research, however, focuses on the biology of the brain. The term "Neuroplasticity" refers to the brain's ability to create new neural links, or paths, and it is known to diminish or fade completely in the brains of dementia patients. Assisted living memory care communities, like those of Chicago-based Pathway to Living, employ a process they call "rementia." This approach employs techniques like environmental stimuli to reignite neural pathways, and in the process, help residents become engaged and communicative again, according to Maria Oliva, COO.

Meanwhile, along the way, research is beginning to uncover definitive links between physical and cognitive health, and therapists today are now convinced that both must be strong in order to keep the bodies and minds of aging humans whole.



The Power of Mobile Apps for Dementia Patients

The burgeoning availability of mobile “apps” has given memory caregivers and long-term care facilities a new set of tools. Many of these apps include previously discussed puzzles and brain games designed to stimulate the brains of those suffering from dementia.

Nettie Harper, MSRS, CTRS, COTP, co-founder of Inspired Memory Care, a large New York City-based training and consulting services provider, lists the following as some of the most helpful apps:

- Amazon Alexa. Social engagement solution providers are finding opportunities for Alexa as a means to keep memory care residents connected to family and friends with just the power of their voice. “Families can support loved ones by setting reminders for pills, appointments, and engagement routines in their own voice,” Harper adds. The app can also provide personalized music and radio stations that promote relaxation and in some cases, stimulate memory. When integrated with “smart” devices, dementia residents can use their voice to instruct Alexa to perform functions like turning on lights and controlling inside temperatures.
- Streaming videos. Streaming services such as Amazon Prime Video and Netflix allow residents to access a variety of visual entertainment, bringing “high caliber learning and cultural experiences to individuals living with memory impairment or whose mobility has been restricted.”
- Tactus. While Tactus is not a substitute for speech therapy, it has been used to support “procedural learning and to coach care-partners on using spaced retrieval techniques to teach their clients and loved ones new information.” Tactus provides a wide assortment of apps applicable to speech and language therapy, including some that support those living with aphasia, a condition that affects those with dementia that can result in the loss of ability to understand or express speech.
- Home4Care. A tablet-based app that grew out of a National Institute of Health memory care study, Home4Care enables home health staff to utilize innovative activities with their clients. In the process, the home health providers get to know their clients better and receive training in how to provide the best possible care for those with whom they work with.
- GPS location and tracking devices. GPS services are being used in a wide variety of ways to prevent elopement or locate seniors, including those with memory issues. Many of the devices are embedded in items like pendants, bracelets and apparel.
- SafeWander. This app sends an alert to caregivers’ phones when an individual leaves the bed. “The individual living with dementia does not have his or her sleep disrupted by loud alarms and a sensor is triggered by a forward shift in weight, rather than by shifting the weight off of a bed pad, meaning the signal to the care-partner is triggered earlier in the process of rising than with most bed alarms.”
- SingFit. This app, according to Harper, “has allowed us to support our clients with finding their voice, sharing their emotions, and memories.” SingFit encourages the user to sing, records their voice utilizing a lyric coach and provides background music for those who have the words but need the support of melody.
- Facetime. This popular app is finding its way into memory care, and its applications in programming and as an intervention for residents living with memory impairment are powerful, says Harper. “For one couple, we



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used it to minimize distress during a respite stay at a residential treatment facility,” she recalls. “A husband was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer’s disease at the beginning of his retirement, which eventually restricted his ability to travel with his wife as they had dreamed. When he reached the stage in which he felt he could no longer tolerate the long flights to foreign places, he and his wife discussed and decided she would ‘carry the torch’ without him.” While the husband resided for two weeks at a residential treatment facility where he could have engagement and support with medications and meals, the wife took her iPhone and a generous data plan along on their planned trip to Asia. The wife faithfully ‘Facetimed’ her husband from each new destination, sharing sights and stories so that he could feel connected to her and to the journey. He began to learn to use the iPad, holding it independently, accepting incoming calls, and navigating icons. Following his wife on her journey via the iPad helped to minimize the emotional distress of their separation, as well as the feeling of being forgotten

New technology is helping senior living communities and their staff respond to the many challenges their memory care residents face. ValueMed pharmacists also help respond to memory care challenges, with pharmacological expertise and unparalleled support so these residents can age in place rather than move to skilled nursing. Contact us at ValueMed@PharMerica.com or 866-628-2583 to learn more.