

Dementia Knowledge Through Empathy and Immersion

Leading Chicago area nonprofit eldercare service providers CJE SeniorLife and Elderwerks have joined together to develop **Dementia Reality™**, a groundbreaking virtual reality (VR) training initiative that implements an intentional, supportive, and person-centered approach to dementia care that focuses on understanding the unique person with AD/DRD through respectful relationships that foster normalcy, choice, purpose, belonging, and security; and equips caregivers to provide care more empathetically, efficiently, and cost-effectively. **Dementia Reality™** addresses the signs, symptoms, and care needs of persons with AD/DRD, while promoting their health, function, and well-being, and that of those providing their care.

This is accomplished through an innovative instructional program that incorporates evidence-based dementia curricula, enhanced by a series of 360-degree VR video training modules. **Dementia Reality's™** five modules demonstrate a first-person view of challenging, industry-specific scenarios from both the caregiver's and client/resident's perspectives (as an example, Module #1 addresses Activities of Daily Living). Each module showcases many of the common errors made by caregivers, followed by another version of the same scenario showing a better way to handle that situation.

Program Description

Dementia Reality™ combines the VR experience with education and guidance in real-life applications that can be customized for audiences in a variety of professional spheres, including non-physician care providers, community organizations, CNA and nursing programs, first responders (i.e. police, firefighters, paramedics), and anyone with a need for AD/DRD training. Unlike a standard video, the 360-degree VR experience uses customized headsets and interactive videos to create an immersive, three-dimensional environment that imparts a sense of "body transfer"—the sense that one is really "there." It allows participants to physically and emotionally experience the progressive cognitive and sensory impairment of individuals with AD/DRD, thus helping to shape empathic behavior. Sensors in the head-mounted display allow the visual world to be rendered in synchrony with head movements as participants explore the virtual environment. Participants are taken through what it is like to struggle with activities of daily living; experience awkwardness, confusion, and garbled speech during social activities or when trying to communicate; and experience sundowning, as confusion and agitation worsen later in the day.

Dementia Reality™ Benefits for Staff

- Empathy for individuals living with dementia through first-hand experience.
- Increased knowledge and understanding of AD/DRD; 6-hour CEU-certified dementia training in personhood/safety/empathy/behaviors.
- Retention of knowledge/skills learned through immersion; engages and motivates the adult learner with an experiential component that gives context to lessons learned.
- Acceleration of skills; participants can reflect upon and apply new knowledge.
- Improved job satisfaction leads to increased staff retention.
- Increased safety; fewer staff injuries.

Dementia Reality™ Benefits for Clients and Residents

- Improved quality of care: Focus on personhood and unconscious bias facilitates awareness of resident and family preferences, values, cultural traditions, and socio-economic conditions.
- Improved behavioral outcomes and decreased use of psychotropic medications.
- Increased safety: Better communication, improved care means fewer falls and other injuries.
- Enhanced care relationships, improved quality of life.