



## Virtual Reality Dementia Training Breakthrough

What do you get when you combine passion and experience? Something extraordinary, of course! That is precisely what just happened with the partnership between a veteran trainer, a cognitive health specialist, a dementia expert, and two well-respected not-for-profit organizations.

**The answer:** The first virtual reality dementia program combining skills training with real-life obstacles in a virtual environment. The outcome is more empathetic caregivers and happier, engaged patients.

### Who is behind the non-profit Dementia Reality®?

CJE SeniorLife and Elderwerks Educational Services (Elderwerks) are dedicating their intellectual and financial resources to make Dementia Reality® a program that benefits the healthcare system, families, and patients with dementia.

CJE SeniorLife, established in 1971, is a non-profit eldercare service provider of housing, community-based resources, healthcare services, and applied research for senior health. Headquartered in suburban Chicago, CJE SeniorLife benefits 20,000 caregivers and clients annually. It has extensive experience in dementia-related programs and creating virtual reality experiences.

Elderwerks, also a non-profit in suburban Chicago, was established in 2012. This social service organization coordinates, advocates, and educates seniors and their families about senior living and available resources. They are considered “senior guidance advisors” and advise over 11,000 individuals per year. Elderwerks is skilled in developing educational programs for professionals in aging services.

Catherine Samatas, Director of Engagement and Innovative Programming at CJE SeniorLife who helped develop Dementia Reality® says, “This project is a collaboration of many talented people. Among the key contributors are Elderwerks’ Certified Dementia Educator and Training Specialist Chris Petrik, and Sarah Cohen, a Cognitive Health Specialist.”



## **What is the Dementia Reality® difference?**

The new educational virtual model utilizes technology to immerse the attendees into the dementia world to experience situations as a person with dementia and as a third-party viewer watching the interaction between a person with dementia and others. The program helps people learn empathy and connect the different pathways from logical understanding to empathetic realization.

The series of training sessions are supported in a teaching environment with master trainers who have at least five years of experience with dementia training. In groups of up to 10, trainees experience the real-world difficulties of having and caring for people with dementia.

Each chapter opens with a real-life situation in the virtual reality setting. The person-centered focus is not only on the patient but also on the concerns of the caregivers. Group discussions among the trainees and trainers are part of the overall curriculum. Once the first six-hour course is completed, trainees are certified and awarded six continuing educational units (CEU) hours towards the state's mandates for caregivers.

According to Elderwerks owner Jennifer Prell, "We are very excited about the advancement in dementia training that Dementia Reality® brings to all those who want to learn about and help those with dementia. Elderwerks' education team is ready to move forward with this new instructional model."

## **Improving employee longevity**

Extreme worker shortages have the healthcare system constantly struggling to recruit and retain enough healthcare workers to meet escalating demand. One in six nursing homes reports a shortage of nursing assistants. Sixty-four percent of new hires in aging services turnover within the first six months of employment. High turnover rates of nurses and CNAs in nursing homes cost upwards of 16% of the annual salary to replace a lost employee.

According to Dan Fagin, CEO of CJE Senior Life, "Excellent training can solve some of the reasons for today's workforce shortage. Dementia Reality® brings training to



multiple senses which as we have learned, is a far more effective way to train and engage employees so they are confident and successful in their jobs.” He continued, “CJE has always been committed to serving older adults and with this new training we

expect to see exceptionally positive outcomes for both the trainees and the patients they care for. We are gratified to fulfill our mission to serve seniors with this outstanding program.”

Federal education standards for caregivers changed from 75 to 120 hours with a stronger emphasis on individuals with dementia. This new way of learning will help. However, many current programs lack the multi-sensory and multi-layered teaching that exposes the personal frustration caregivers can feel. Dementia Reality® provides the knowledge and tools to overcome the stressors of caring for an older adult with dementia and affords the confidence for employees to know and appreciate the vital role they play in patients’ lives.

## **Preserving patient dignity**

Confusion, phobias, and anxiety are common reactions in dementia patients. When this occurs, injuries, hospitalizations, and increased psychotropic drug use can result. The empathy training by Dementia Reality® reduces the negative interaction incidents, and therefore, the patient’s dignity is preserved, even in personal situations. The caregiver learns how to guide the patient with compassion and patience to minimize anxiety and encourage peaceful consent.

## **The Financial Gain**

A silver lining to this ground-breaking training is the effective cost savings it will bring to the states, insurance companies, nursing homes, hospitals, and other organizations. Less drug use, injuries, hospitalizations, fewer worker compensation claims, and happier, more time-efficient caregivers reduce the costs associated with dementia care.

Organizations can access the Dementia Reality® instruction with a Master Dementia Training Specialist and the programmed virtual reality goggles locally! The affordable pricing allows organizations to benefit from comprehensive instruction, and immersive empathy training at a rate competitive with less in-depth programs.



## Where to find out more

CJE SeniorLife and Elderwerks announce the grand opening of their product launch on June 9th. To attend, or learn more about Dementia Reality®, visit our website at [DementiaReality.org](http://DementiaReality.org).

## Dementia Facts

- Dementia is a term used to describe different brain disorders that affect memory, thinking, behavior and emotion.
- Early symptoms of dementia can include memory loss, difficulty performing familiar tasks, problems with language and changes in personality.
- There is no current cure for dementia.
- There are several types of dementia, however Alzheimer's Disease is the most common cause.
- 55 million people worldwide live with dementia.
- A new case of dementia arises somewhere in the world every 3 seconds.