

Tuesday 3 December 2019

VR to improve health and meal times for people living with dementia

Dementia Australia's Centre for Dementia Learning has launched a new workshop, '**A day in the life – mealtime experience**', using engaging VR technology aimed at educating aged care professionals on how they can provide a better dining experience for people living with dementia.

Anthony Boffa, Acting CEO Dementia Australia said for all of us our experiences with food and mealtimes are anchor points throughout each day.

"The tastes, aromas, environment and social connections we get to enjoy in our everyday activities should be just as positive and engaging for people living with dementia in an aged care home," Mr Boffa said.

"Dining is a sensory experience that should be celebrated and enjoyed at every stage of life; dementia does not change the desire for an enjoyable meal."

The innovative 'A day in the life – mealtime experience' workshop enables aged care professionals to experience mealtimes through the eyes of a person living with dementia thanks to a virtual reality element used as part of a comprehensive training package.

Poor nutrition is a major health problem for many older people, and especially those living with dementia. According to a 2015 Dementia Australia discussion paper on nutrition, poor nutritional intake and a lack of fluids can contribute to the development of delirium in people with dementia, which can lead to rapid declines in mental state and changes in behaviour¹.

"Unfortunately because nutrition is a health concern for people living with dementia, it is crucial to educate aged care employees on how they can create an environment that facilitates eating not only for enjoyment but also for better health.

"This reinforces Dementia Australia's call for the need for mandatory, dementia specific training for the aged care workforce as we know a more informed and trained workforce will result in improved health and care experiences for people living with dementia in residential aged care."

The virtual reality technology used in 'A day in the life – mealtime experience' was developed by Dementia Australia with Deakin University.

Co-Director of Deakin University's Applied Artificial Intelligence Institute – known as A²I², Professor Kon Mouzakis said 'A day in the life – mealtime experience' is an example of how virtual reality technology can be used to foster empathy and understanding.

"As the user experiences the impact of distractions like pagers buzzing, the clutter of crockery and competing conversations going on around them it can provide a valuable learning opportunity.

"We want to help all people who work in aged care to understand how all this activity combined presents for a person living with dementia who will be trying to process what's going on around them whilst at the same time wanting to enjoy their meal," Professor Mouzakis said.

'A day in the life – mealtime experience' is one of a comprehensive suite of education programs offered to all aged care providers across Australia delivered by Dementia Australia's Centre for Dementia Learning.

The Centre for Dementia Learning offers both accredited and non-accredited courses delivered face-to-face across Australia, as well as online. The Centre for Dementia Learning also offers a range of innovative technology available to educate and support people living with dementia, their carers and families.

For more information about the Centre for Dementia Learning, its national services and technology, please visit dementialearning.org.au

¹ Dementia and Nutrition in the Home (November 2015). Alzheimer's Australia NSW, Discussion Paper 14.

Dementia Australia is the national peak body and charity for people, of all ages, living with all forms of dementia, their families and carers. It provides advocacy, support services, education and information. An estimated 447,000 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach almost 1.1 million by 2058. Dementia Australia is the new voice of Alzheimer's Australia. Dementia Australia's services are supported by the Australian Government.

National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500

Interpreter service available

(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)

Dementia is a National Health Priority Area

www.dementia.org.au

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When talking or writing about dementia please refer to [Dementia-Friendly Language Guidelines](#).