

Fully virtual program is a game changer for people living with dementia

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An innovative, Baycrest-developed dementia care program can reduce the need for hospital admissions by 60%, according to a study published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* today. The program, called the

Virtual Behavioural Medicine (VBM) program, allows clinicians to assess and manage patients with severe neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia while the patients remain in their homes. VBM also supports acute care hospitals in the management of individuals with severe neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia.

"Severe symptoms such as aggression, agitation and hallucinations are often the driving factor in people living with dementia being transferred to emergency departments, specialized behavioral units or acute care hospitals to receive treatment and care," says Dr. Morris Freedman, Head of Neurology at Baycrest, Scientist at Baycrest's Rotman Research Institute and senior author of the study. "The VBM program is a game changer for these individuals because it can significantly reduce the need for them to be uprooted from their homes, a move that can make their behavior worse."

In this study, researchers evaluated the effectiveness of the VBM program by reviewing the files of all patients assessed in the program, from its inception in February 2020 until the end of December 2020. They looked at the patients' symptom severity during their initial assessment and compared them to those at the end of the study period.

Patients were referred to the VBM program from long-term care and acute care facilities, and from the community, such as private residences and retirement homes. Patients and their families, caregivers and healthcare teams met virtually with a VBM physician who assessed the patient and prescribed interventions as needed. The VBM team then reviewed patient progress during virtual follow-up appointments on a regular basis.

The researchers found that VBM successfully reduced the proportion of patients who needed admission to a specialized inpatient unit by 60%. This suggests that the VBM program is highly effective for managing the

majority of patients living with severe neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia without the need to physically transfer them to a specialized program, thus avoiding unnecessary and upsetting changes in their environment.

"The number of people diagnosed with dementia worldwide is expected to triple from 50 to 150 million by 2050. This means that more and more individuals and their families will be impacted by severe dementia symptoms," says Dr. Freedman. "As a fully virtual program, VBM can be adopted worldwide and therefore has the potential to help people living with [dementia](#) everywhere to live their best possible lives."

More information: Morris Freedman et al, Virtual Behavioural Medicine Program: A Novel Model of Care for Neuropsychiatric Symptoms in Dementia¹, *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* (2022). [DOI: 10.3233/JAD-215403](#)

Provided by Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care

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