

Digital training program improves quality of life for care residents with dementia—even during the COVID-19 pandemic

December 20 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Quality of life for people with dementia living in residential and nursing home care substantially improved after staff took part in a digital

training program that was specially adapted to COVID-19 restrictions. The training also led to a significant drop in the prescription of potentially harmful sedative medications to residents.

The [iWHELD](#) program supported care home staff in delivering personalized care and encouraging meaningful social interactions. Through a [digital platform](#) featuring live coaching sessions led by trained coaches, the program supported homes during the COVID-19 pandemic to enhance care and share best practices among peers.

The trial was delivered to staff supporting more than 700 residents with [dementia](#) across 149 [residential homes](#) in the UK, comparing iWHELD with usual care. In the iWHELD group, researchers found particular benefits in residents who contracted COVID-19, those who showed signs of agitation when the study began, and those taking psychiatric medications.

The paper, appearing in *Alzheimer's & Dementia*, is titled "Impact of the iWHELD Digital Person-Centered Care Program on Quality of Life, Agitation and Psychotropic Medications in People with Dementia Living in Nursing Homes during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Randomized Controlled Trial."

Led by the University of Exeter and King's College London, iWHELD is designed to support caregivers and residents by training staff in delivering personalized care, which puts residents at the heart of decision-making. The program was specially adapted during the pandemic, so that it could be delivered remotely, with support available for care home staff, even in the most challenging circumstances for care homes.

Joanne McDermid, creator of the iWHELD platform and lead author of the paper, said, "Urgent action is needed to ensure care homes have access to dementia care training and support that is both high quality and

shown to be effective. Every person deserves thoughtful and compassionate care and not everyone is receiving it."

"In response to the unfolding global pandemic, iWHELD was created as a ground-breaking, first-of-its-kind solution, placing care staff and people living with dementia at the heart of support for care homes and nursing homes. iWHELD leverages digital innovation to bring together stories, ideas, and communities. It's the first program to provide an effective, evidence-based, affordable and scalable solution that can address the needs of care and [nursing homes](#) and critically, to improve the lives of the people with dementia."

Katie Ives, manager of Stonebow House care home in Worcestershire, took part in the iWHELD training along with her management team. She said, "We all really enjoyed it, and it's made a huge difference to some of our residents. As part of the training around personalized care, we've realized we need to change our approaches and even our demeanors to communicate effectively with residents—so if someone is quite reserved, being very bubbly is less effective and relatable to that person."

"We've always tailored our approach to residents, but now we offer a wider variety of activities and clubs to suit people's interests in their lives, and we're seeing some residents spend more time in communal areas and less time in their rooms as a result."

Professor Clive Ballard, of the University of Exeter Medical School, senior author on the paper, said, "People with dementia living in residential and nursing [home care](#) are among the most vulnerable in society, and [care homes](#) and their staff perform an extremely challenging role. iWHELD is an effective, practical, and affordable program that can enable staff to improve the lives of people with dementia and can be delivered nationally and internationally—even amidst a pandemic."

More information: Impact of the iWHELD Digital Person-Centered Care Program on Quality of Life, Agitation and Psychotropic Medications in People with Dementia Living in Nursing Homes during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Randomized Controlled Trial', *Alzheimer's & Dementia* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/alz.13582](https://doi.org/10.1002/alz.13582)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Digital training program improves quality of life for care residents with dementia—even during the COVID-19 pandemic (2023, December 20) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-digital-quality-life-residents-dementiaeven.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.