

# THERAPEUTIC VR: CASE STUDY

## SENIOR HOME, WEINBERG RESIDENCE

### HOW THE WEINBERG RESIDENCE USED VIRTUAL REALITY

Epionia came into Weinberg Residence to give the seniors a demonstration of how Virtual Reality works and allowing them a glimpse into how the technology can be used.

Melissa, the Recreation Therapist at the Weinberg Residence, was amazed at how excited the Residents got when they tried on the Virtual Reality headsets. It was unlike anything they had ever done. “It was an amazing day,” Melissa said. “Usually we only get five or six people to one of our events. But twenty-five people showed up to try the Virtual Reality headset.”

### THE OUTCOMES OF USING EPIONIA

Melissa was very thankful Epionia was able to visit the Weinberg Residence and give a demonstration to the Residents. The seniors immediately became more relaxed, tranquil and responsive following their experience with the VR headset.

“I see Virtual Reality as the future for seniors,” Mellissa said. “And Epionia is doing an amazing job as not only ambassadors of the technology, but they are on the forefront of the revolution in helping seniors with the array of issues they are facing.”

Melissa was impressed at how the euphoria lasted long after the demonstration concluded. The seniors who tried the VR often became more positive.

Melissa understands the potential Virtual Reality has when it comes to dealing with many healthcare issues seniors face. “It can be hard transitioning from your house to assisted living. Suddenly everything is different. You don’t have the freedom you once had and that can weigh on you emotionally. Virtual Reality can address that problem.”

### BACKGROUND

Virtual Reality (VR) is a relatively new technology which we’ve never seen the likes of before and is revolutionizing the way we live, work, and think.

Virtual Reality is completely different. It is not tweaking an existing platform or improving on a technology we already have. It's taking extraordinary leaps, advancing and forging a new future for humanity. VR engages our senses on a deeper level than anything we've seen on either desktop or mobile technologies.

As a new medium that is constantly evolving and adapting, Virtual Reality is disrupting all types of industries including architecture, learning, and gaming. But, one of the industries we at Epionia, are setting a new standard in is Health & Wellness.

At Epionia, we are using VR to benefit both practitioners and patients in a clinical environment to improve the way we treat illness and mental health. We use it to reduce pain and anxiety in all types of situations, shifting away from drug dependency and creating a better, more fulfilling life for all the people we come into contact with.

There are many practical implications for VR. Studies have shown that giving a patient VR technology reduces their level of pain, stress, and anxiety before, during, and after medical procedures such as physical therapy, bandage change, dental surgery, and chemotherapy.

In this study, we took Virtual Reality technology to a Nursing Care Centre for senior citizens. We wanted to see how the elderly interacted with VR and what impact it had on them. Unfortunately, many seniors face an array of physical health and mental issues. However, we now know technology can help with a lot of those issues.

We used the Weinberg Residence, a boutique residence for Jewish seniors in Vancouver's Oakridge community, for this research. The Weinberg Residence offers Assisted Living, and for more complex needs, Multi-Level Care for anyone who needs it.

## THE PROBLEM

Growing old is unavoidable. With advancements and understanding of healthcare, the elderly population is growing larger, not only placing a burden on our healthcare but creating a societal dilemma. Seniors are facing numerous physical and psychological challenges that often prevent them from living a full happy lifestyle.

Their lack of mobility, detreating mental health among other issues causes many elderlies to experience anxiety, depression, boredom, and loneliness. In fact:

- ▶ 18 percent of seniors live alone, while 43 percent report feeling lonely on a regular basis, according to a study conducted by researchers from the University of California.

- ▶ Lonely seniors are more likely to decline and die faster. People 60-years-old and older who reported feeling lonely saw a 45 percent increase in their risk for death. Isolated elders also had a 59 percent greater risk of mental and physical decline than their more social counterparts.
- ▶ 1 in 7 people with Alzheimer's disease live alone, according to a recently released report from the Alzheimer's Association.

With advancing age, it's inevitable that people lose connection with their friends and or family members. Depression is the most common mental health problem for older adults and has deep negative impacts on all aspects of their life, not to mention the impact on family and the community. Even though depression is common among older adults, it should not be considered a normal part of aging.

For example, nearly a quarter of the 600,000 people who experience a stroke will experience clinical depression according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Unfortunately, symptoms of depression are often overlooked and untreated when they coincide with other medical illnesses or life events that commonly occur as people age. However, clinical depression is never a "normal" response; it is a serious medical illness that should be treated at any age.

We strongly believe mental health can be improved with Virtual Reality technology and have conducted numerous studies to prove this thesis.

## RESULT

Today technology is developing ways to help seniors battle issues with their physical and emotional health. Virtual Reality is an important tool to help the elderly with a variety of these problems.

When we put on a demonstration at the Weinberg Residence, we had more than three times the turnout of a typical event. There was lots of excitement around the VR technology. The staff noticed an energy in the room that they hadn't witnessed with any other event before.

We had two headsets which the residents took turns trying out a Lakeside scenario. Once the residents tried it, they immediately wanted another turn. One woman wanted a headset for her husband. The staff noted the seniors became more relaxed, happier, and improve their mood during and after the use of the Virtual Reality. Feeling as if they are actually in the surrounding they're being shown, the seniors remark on how pleasing the experience is and how happy it's made them feel.

The staff immediately saw the long-term implications of Virtual Reality as not only a tool to help engage and activate the seniors on an emotional and intellectual level but even help with seniors who had more complex needs like Alzheimer's or clinical depression.

"It is a tool that works when nothing else does," said Melissa. "The seniors were much more happier and content after trying the headset. The result was immediate."

Although not a substitute for actual mobility, Virtual Reality is a great tool to help seniors experience activities and places which they would not be able to within the confines of a care home or a wheelchair.

## CONCLUSION

Epionia is planning to expand its use of Virtual Reality in more senior care centers, implementing more long-term uses, hopefully gathering more data on how Virtual Reality can be implemented as a permanent solution in healthcare.

It is also important that clinicians realize anxiety, depression, loneliness, and boredom in the elderly is treatable with Virtual Reality and that treatment can result in major functional, social and health gains. With VR, a seniors' general health and mental wellbeing can improve, resulting in a happier more fulfilling life. Specifically, through consistent VR use, it can help battle diseases like depression, anxiety, and even decreased the symptoms of dementias, especially in seniors who feel a sense of isolation and lack of freedom, lessening their dependence on drugs and healthcare resources.

For more information on how Virtual Reality is helping the healthcare field visit our website at [Epionia.com](https://epionia.com) or contact us at [hello@epionia.com](mailto:hello@epionia.com).