

# CABHI-supported app integrates serious gaming into geriatric education

By Rebecca Ihilchik

**A**cross Canada, nearly 33 per cent of frail elderly admitted to hospital from long-term care are admitted unnecessarily. Point-of-care staff including nurses and personal support workers must be more skilled than ever before in observing and responding to early, subtle signs of acute deterioration.

The SOS Educational App for Healthcare aims to strengthen geriatric specialty knowledge for these healthcare providers in order to prevent unnecessary emergency room visits.

The unique app, which can be accessed on one's smartphone or computer, presents simulated case scenarios involving elderly clients to users in a multiple choice game format. Users – who range from working professionals to students – must assess these virtual clients based on the symptoms provided. The program enables users to monitor their learning outcomes and to tailor future learning to address identified performance gaps.

The technology is supported by the Baycrest-led Centre for Aging + Brain

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Health Innovation (CABHI). The SOS app team is led by manager Dr. Raquel Meyer and interprofessional educator Jennifer Reguindin of Ontario's Centres for Learning, Research & Innovation in Long-Term Care (CLRI) at Baycrest.

In 2018 the app won the prestigious Ted Freedman Award for Innovation in Education, a major international recognition.

"We took what students usually learn in a didactic manner and practice only in stressful situations, and turned it into an opportunity to compete and collaborate amongst themselves," says Reguindin.

The app can be played at any time, meaning the educational component isn't limited to time spent in the classroom or placement. It also provides instant feedback to the user.

"If you get a case wrong, the app gives you a reflective prompt. It teaches you clinical decision-making skills so that when you go back, you have a better understanding of the questions you should have asked," says Dr. Meyer.

"During the testing period, the students and players were amazed that they were learning and improving," says Reguindin. "Their level of awareness in how they engage and communicate in clinical settings increased and their instructors were noting the difference."

Because the app is so accessible, it can help supplement specialized

knowledge for students or professionals who are not exposed to diverse groups of patients and cases – for example, those practicing outside of a central urban region.

"Clinical placements are getting scarcer, and alternative solutions like the SOS app are part of an upward trend toward integrating technology into clinical education," says Dr. Meyer. "Given the extent to which this next generation of students is involved in gaming and is engaged in virtual spaces like social media, I think it's wise for educators to think of how to tap into that and draw these students in."

The app is supported by CABHI's Spark program, which funds the development or refinement of early-stage innovations informed by the experience of point-of-care staff. Through Spark, CABHI is helping the SOS team refine the app from a beta version into a commercially viable product. They're looking into packaging the SOS educational app into a suite of products to market to nursing and long-term care homes. They also plan to work with colleges and universities to explore how the app could function as a learning material in gerontology courses.

"I'm not sure that without CABHI's support we would have gotten to the stage of having an actual business model and go-to-market strategy, so we're incredibly grateful," Dr. Meyer



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*RIGHT: Jennifer Reguindin and Dr. Raquel Meyer, SOS App innovators.*

says. "CABHI brings a lot of expertise to the table in helping healthcare providers navigate this very different space and connecting us with the right resources."

Integrating this crucial piece of education into an engaging, accessible platform across care homes and higher education means current and future point-of-care staff will be able to keep their knowledge up-to-date more easily than ever before. They'll be better equipped to detect and respond to early signs of acute deterioration in the older adults they care for, and avoid preventable emergency room visits – resulting in a safer, healthier older adult population and a more efficient healthcare system.

"We know the app has potential not just for care of the elderly or in



long-term care, but for any clinical population: pediatrics, oncology, diabetes," says Dr. Meyer. "We just think

there's huge potential for one small innovation to have a large impact on the sector."

Learn more at [www.cabhi.com](http://www.cabhi.com). The SOS App can be accessed and played at <http://sosapp.baycrest.org>.

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