

8th International Conference on

Geriatrics Gerontology & Palliative Nursing

July 30-31, 2018 | Barcelona, Spain

Virtual Reality for seniors: A first encounter of residents of a long-term care facility with VR

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Many residents of long-term care facilities have no options for self-determined activities due to their physical limitations. In addition to the hospital-like environment of care facilities, the lack of opportunities for retreatment has an impact on the well-being of people in need of care. Virtual reality glasses, adapted to the needs of users, can be used to virtually visit places that would be difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to experience in real life. They can once again experience something new, visit their favourite places in the context of virtual excursions and thereby relieve stress and strengthen their resilience. In this study, residents of a nursing home in Vienna, Austria were asked to try on virtual reality glasses and report their first experiences. Despite prevailing prejudices, results show that virtual reality is of great interest to the residents. Residents reported about exciting explorations of the virtual environments. Austrian destinations, nature scenes in the mountains and forests but also trips to the zoo, the museum, in churches or places of everyday life, like shopping streets or train stations would be places for the residents, they would like to explore virtually. Far-off destinations such as Rio de Janeiro or the Caribbean are more of an exception. Biographically relevant places such as the parental home or the location of their wedding were not named. The residents identified possible uses in therapy, VR as a distraction from everyday life, as an opportunity to participate in cultural and social life and to relax. With the elderly being interested in this new technology, many use cases in therapy and care open up for further research and application. In terms of ease of use, an adjustment of the VR glasses for a long-term use in care facilities in any case necessary.

Biography

Victoria Mühlegger has been working at the Academy for Age Research since August 2016, with a focus on teaching and research. She studied Psychology and Aging Services Management, specializing in Gerontopsychology and topics such as active aging, new forms of housing and care for old age and the end of life. As part of her research, she is particularly concerned with the individual design of everyday life for people living in care facilities, be it horticultural therapy or virtual reality. For her, the practical relevance of scientific findings is particularly relevant in order to ensure the best possible care for the elderly.

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