

Welcome to season six of Bridge The Gap, a podcast dedicated to informing, educating, and influencing the future of housing and services for seniors. Powered by sponsors Accushield, Enquire, Connected Living, Hamilton CapTel, Refera, Service Master, The Bridge Group Construction and Solinity. The contributors are brought to you by Peak Senior Living and produced by Solinity Marketing.

Josh 0:49

Welcome to Bridge The Gap, the senior living podcast. I'm your host, Josh, and I'm so excited to have guests with me today. Chris Brickler MindVR CEO, and a new partnership they have forged with Select Rehabilitation, Dr. Kathleen Weissberg, the National Director of Education. Thank you all for being with us today.

Chris 1:14

Thank you.

Kathleen 1:15

Thank you for having us.

Josh 1:16

I first want to start off, and many of our audience are very familiar with both of your companies, but many don't know that you all have formed a partnership over the past year and there's so many exciting things going on between your companies and what you're doing for the senior living industry. Chris, can you tell our audience a little bit more about the why behind the partnership and what is happening?

Chris 1:44

Yeah, Josh, you know, it's been a really great, 2022. At the beginning of 2022, we did partner with Select, after learning about their progressive vision into therapy, and especially technology and how technology's going to impact, therapy over the course of the future. We went into a partnership in early 2022, trialed this out on a number of customers, got our teams together, to try to figure out really how we move the needle in this space using virtual reality as a new very powerful and fun tool and a new approach, to therapy that could only help in therapy sessions is what our theory was. And I think we did pretty well with our piloting last year in the early part of 2022. And then we basically strengthened our partnership going into the back half of 22, and then going into this year, to where we're now, actually co-developing, some very exciting developments in VR specifically around activities of daily living. And Kathleen will talk much more about those types of areas of overlap. But it's a really exciting place that the two companies are finding ourselves in here.

Josh 02:58

Well, that is, is super exciting. And Dr. Kathleen, many people may not think who've traditionally been working in senior living for years. When we think about rehabilitation and therapies in senior living, maybe technology is not the first thing that comes to mind. With you heading up so much of the education for your organization, why is this so important to you all and why should this be so important and exciting for the senior living industry?

Kathleen 3:28

That's a great question, and I think technology needs to be at the forefront. I mean, if we look at where therapy is going. Technology has this opportunity really to change the landscape of what we are doing in our clinics, what we are doing with our patients, with our residents. And, echo what Chris said, we are working right now, we as a company have queried, our clinicians are the folks that we serve. What do you need? What are you looking for? And there are these opportunities utilizing virtual reality to immerse that senior in a situation, in an environment that maybe they couldn't be in before. So we're able to simulate things that they've never been able to simulate. Maybe they can't get out and go grocery shopping, but they can do that in a virtual reality world using technology as an adjunct. And it is absolutely a skilled component that we're delivering and using that as an adjunct to traditional therapy. Our patients are engaged, they're excited, they're having a ton of fun utilizing it. So I think to ignore technology is certainly not the way to go. It is definitely the future of what we're doing in therapy.

Josh 4:42

Well, and that is so exciting, and I think, where our industry is, and as the population that we are beginning to serve, there's almost going to be an expectation of technology at the fingertips. One of the things I would like to talk with you all a little bit about is, you know, if you look at the senior living industry, it's vast. There's a lot of different service and product types, a lot of different communities. If you look at the urban, all the way out to the rural communities, and so often we talk about how we can improve quality to more people and have access. Can you tell me how not only your partnership together, maybe be addressing some of those needs, but also kind of what's happening even from an industry perspective, maybe even legislatively, some initiatives that are happening to make this better and make the industry better?

Chris 5:46

Yeah, Josh, I could take a quick stab at that. You know, we're at a really interesting point of inflection, I think as it relates to VR and healthcare. We started this company Mind VR in two, 2016 with the idea that VR and senior healthcare could use a boost of energy around music and memory. So we thought, wow, immersive technology with recognizable melodies in music, would, would be a wonderful way to provide relief in dementia state, for instance. What we have found over the six years now is how there are far more use cases for VR therapy, over and above music therapy. So, it's a vast, a vast area where we can see VR helping across this continuum of care in senior living. But also when we think about VR, we think about that emotional, that cognitive, and that physical wellbeing as a blend. And that's really what Mind VR stands for, is to try to recognize that this older life is very important and still has a lot to learn, still has a lot to engage with and fun. So we try to lift these seniors out of their four walls in these communities into what we call the fifth quadrant, where we can connect them and their consciousness with art, with music, with animals, with pets things that relax. And now you start to take that portfolio and that's kind of a nice to have to some extent, that type of content. It's really works well with seniors. But now in 2022 and beyond, we're seeing mind VR move from kind of a nice to have to a really, a need to have in the flow of therapy. And, so we're listening very loud to what Kathleen is saying here about, Hey, here's where the technology could make a difference places that MindVR would not have thought about. So, one example I like to talk about is, we develop this butterfly catching game. We take a senior, we put them in a very relaxing meadow, digital butterflies are flying around, they're colored there's a challenge in how fast and, and how you catch them. Well, Kathleen had the bright idea, why don't we you know, move these butterflies up, and down at certain PNF patterns to help a shorter rehab? Well,

we wouldn't have thought of that. Kathleen brought that to our attention, and our teams were able to construct that and put that into the field. So now select therapists can use this technology.

Josh 8:21

Wow. So that's really exciting. Something you said, and I think the way you phrased it, Chris, was VR is becoming something that was a kind of nice to have. It's one of those wishlist things to more of I need to have this. So as community leaders out there are beginning to think, oh my gosh, I feel like I'm just getting caught up from post pandemic. We are getting our head above water. Wow, that sounds great. I probably do need to have this, but another program. What am I going to have to do? How am I gonna have to manage that? Do I have the team to do that? Tell the listener what's the first step in this and what does it look like to roll out a program and where do you even start, and where is a good place to start? Is it in the activities and life enrichment program? Is it more on the clinical side? Is it a little bit of both? Where do you start with this program?

Chris 9:28

Yeah, that's a great question. I think VR is really defining itself in specific areas in senior care where I think a massive amount of disruption will happen. So we can't think of VR just as an activity enhancer. We can't think of it just as a new tool for therapists. We can't think of it just as a training apparatus for the staff or a wellness program for the staff. Often our operators staff, caregivers are burnout in long days. We think VR can help them a lot as well. So when you start to look at the overall ROI that VR can make in an operation and that these operators can achieve it gets pretty fascinating when you start adding these other things. And then you asked me a question a minute ago about legislation. So MindVR, we're driving a lot of the legislation as it relates to VR being accepted at the federal level. So there's an actual bipartisan act of Congress that we're supporting called the Access to Prescription Digital Therapeutics Act. And it's gaining a lot of steam. Both sides of the aisle have shown support. It's in the Senate committee now, and we're just really excited about this. A because the federal government is really waking up to the power of VR therapy. When we start thinking about the future state of VR and we think about these headsets and having these immersive glasses, essentially in every healthcare setting imaginable that a senior could touch. The amount of digital therapeutics that can be driven down the network to these headsets is really fascinating in terms of how fast that can grow. Our job is to make the interface very simple, easy to use, one button. So when Kathleen's therapists are out in the field, it's one button, turn it on, and they're into the application that is part of that person's care plan. And when we see that going from end-to-end, Josh, in terms of how a community is actually implementing this into the fabric of the operations, that's when it gets very exciting to me.

Kathleen 11:32

And just having seen this in our communities and implementing this in our communities. I wanna echo what Chris is saying. If we are looking at this in silos, that's not the way to look at it. There is applicability of virtual reality across every aspect of senior care, senior living. So for example, I can use this in assisted living or independent living, working on home safety modules that are built into there various things, as Chris was mentioning, the PNF patterns, things for balance, things for safety and to reduce falls. I can take it to my dementia unit where I have this visual. Then I can pair that with some sort of scent. So I have this multi-sensory type of engagement. I can bring it to my nursing staff and do training on those same types of things. I can bring it to activities, pair a few headsets together, and we do a travel log for people who used to love to travel. I can bring it into therapy. There's so much applicability to this. And

you answer, you asked the question, you know, how do you get it started? How do you get it set up? I'll tell you what's worked for us the best. And this is so simple, but put on a headset, put on a headset, turn it on, look at the programs, and then just think, wow, what could I do with this? And the opportunities are endless and people get so excited. I mean, Chris mentioned the butterfly game. There's dogs, there's hiking, I mean, you name it, there's all sorts of stuff built into there. And they do, they get really excited and think, oh, so and so could use this, so and so could use that. And, and it just morphs from there to find that applicability. So it's not as challenging as one might think. It really is brimming with excitement.

Josh 13:15

Now also, one of the things, and this probably shows my ignorance on where technology has far advanced, even to my understanding in being able to keep up with how fast technology is changing and advancing. But I have often thought as the virtual reality is being kind of single person and individual experience. But my understanding is now that this can be more of a multi-person group experience endeavor. Is that correct?

Chris 13:46

Yes. Some of the hype in the VR space is certainly about multi-user 360 3D worlds where people can go and interact. Largely being driven by Meta for teenagers as a playground to socialize. When it comes to seniors we have to think about a couple things. Number one, older adults they adopted everything from FM radio to color TV to personal computers, to the internet, to social media, to smartphones. The one thing they didn't adopt along the way were Atari, video games that our generation might have played a lot of. So, this whole idea of video game graphics and CGI and things like that, we have to be very-very thoughtful, let's put it that way, about how we implement technologies along those lines. Is the power of virtual reality, the gaming engine allowing us to connect grandma or grandpa in the private metaverse that we're creating for that community, with an outside, family member that's 2000 miles away. The answer is absolutely yes. This is where it gets really exciting. When you think about social isolation, which is one of the things we try to combat with this technology and you think about connecting younger family members who are pretty up on VR in general because it's kind of swept our culture, but now there's a way they can participate with their elders in VR. This is an exceptional way to inspire, intergenerational communication essentially. You have much more to talk about when, when that granddaughter can go virtually to the Grand Canyon with her grandfather, that's infinitely more material in the first 10 seconds to talk about than generally what gets talked about in some of these demotivating family visitation times.

Kathleen 15:45

Chris, you are so right in that if there was a silver lining to the pandemic, this may have been it. Because we saw when families came together and did that, we weren't sitting there saying, what did you have for lunch? And how did you sleep last night? And then the conversation just stagnates, we got together. And those individuals who were utilizing this platform, these types of platforms, we didn't see that social isolation, that depression, that all of those, those severe effects that we saw with the pandemic, they were still able to connect. And that social connection was so important.

Josh 16:21

Chris, you mentioned earlier your team and your partnership, one of your big focuses in you're putting a lot of energy and effort into legislative actions and bills. Is the goal there primarily to help affordability access? What is really the initiative there that you're really trying to help with?

Chris 16:47

There are a couple of different things. I would say access is probably most important. We were just recently approved as the first supplemental covered benefit by a Medicare Advantage plan. It's pretty groundbreaking when you think about those things because VR is now moved in six years from an idea for senior care to now being attached to a Medicare Advantage plan where it is a covered benefit by AgeWell of New York first of many obviously, in this area. But the great thing is that, again based on our advocacy efforts at the federal level, we're starting to see a thawing of acceptance as VR is a tool that we think can scale very fast and easy. So when we think about software as this sort of future state of a digital pill and we're prescribing these digital treatments. They ride down over the MindVR network and they're administered by the care staff, therapists, the nurses, all the folks that are involved in this senior's life can be administered by those folks.

Chris 18:00

It really turns the paradigm upside down in terms of scaling treatments with software. And I think that's really a big opportunity for the senior living industry to grab onto. Because when you just look at the this year population shift and what's happening and what's gonna strain our resources, not just in communities, but at home as well I think VR is gonna be a heck of a tool to help with that.

Josh 18:25

So VR as we've kind of summarized, has gone from a nice to have to a need to have. And I know our listeners' years are perking up and my co-host and co-founder Lucas is not with us today, but I know we can remember and our producer Sara, about six years ago, which I think that's kind of one of the date benchmarks that you pointed to here today. Six years ago, I can remember us traveling to the Thrive Center in Louisville, Kentucky and putting on for the first time these ginormous, headset goggles. And them telling us "Hey, VR is the future". And us kind of just, actually, I got dizzy putting the first one on. I had to sit down. And, and we didn't really know at that time, well, how could this apply to senior living? We were just kind of guessing, and it's gone from the, the future to the now. And through y'all's partnership making that happen I know our listeners who aren't already on board with looking and evaluating how VR is going to shape their communities, they will be after today. Thank you all for joining us so much. Thank you all for partnering with Bridge the Gap to help bring content and innovation to the senior living industry and to our listeners wherever they may be listening to this podcast. So can't thank you all enough for that.

Chris 20:00

Thank you, Josh.

Kathleen 20:01

Thank you for having us.

Josh 20:02

We are going to link all of your information so that our listeners can direct connect after listening to this podcast. It'll be in our show notes, connect with us, and as you see this episode and all the posts go out online, I hope all of our listeners will engage with Chris and Kathleen and their thought leadership. Jope everyone has enjoyed another great episode of Bridge the Gap. Thanks

20:30

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