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Geropsychologists find success, satisfaction with all manner of online training

By Paula Hartman-Stein, Ph.D.
January 5, 2021

While many psychologists who provide behavioral health services to older adults are bemoaning 2021 Medicare cuts, online gero-entrepreneurs are helping older adults, family caregivers and staff in long-term care in locations around the world

and getting paid for their expertise – with no dependence on insurance and without leaving home.

Training webinars conducted through Zoom, podcasts, blogs, monthly memberships, YouTube videos and sales of products through websites have become online platforms for innovative geropsychologists.

On March 13, applied gerontologist, Cameron Camp, Ph.D. director of research and development at the Center for Applied Research in Dementia in Soldotna, Alaska, spoke at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association during several days of its virtual conference.

“That was my last plane trip for business. I cancelled a training in France scheduled three weeks later. If I hadn’t done so, I might still be in Europe due to Covid travel restrictions,” he said.

After that, Camp said his online training presence accelerated.

He’s conducted about 30 webinars from June to December, reaching long-term care staff and managers across the world. His Montessori-based method of dementia intervention is certified through the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners (NCCDP) and much of his online training comes through that affiliation.

“A sociological shift has occurred because of Covid,” he said.
“Acceptance of distance training is much greater than it ever has been.”

Camp’s organization also offers environmental scans of group homes where a resident uses an iPad to show him the interior of the facility.

And a national company that manages senior living residential communities recently hired Camp to design a program, Engagement During Covid, to teach family members ways to have positive interactive visits with loved ones they cannot visit.

“We help the staff and family learn ways of reducing isolation and loneliness with the help of technology,” he said.

Regina Koepf, Psy.D., a board-certified geropsychologist from Atlanta, began her business, GeroChampions, in 2018 after designing training programs while she worked at a veterans administration hospital.

“I wanted to find more ways to educate providers and families on topics involving mental health and aging while being more inclusive, without being dry or too cerebral, and making the content inviting and digestible,” she said.

The day of our interview, Koepf had just completed a lunch-and-learn online program for a local agency on driving issues with older adults. She has a free checklist on her website describing the biggest driving red flags.

“I have a passion

sexual self-determination and other related issues that arise in long-term care settings. Directors of nursing welcome help with this issue,” she said.

After 10 years at a VA hospital, she became tired of the bureaucracy and annoyed by the shutdown of diversity training programs under the Trump administration. In September, she left her position and now devotes herself to her business fulltime, producing weekly podcasts on the psychology of aging, offering online courses and training and conducting live question-and-answer sessions for groups. Koepp serves on the ethics committee for the Georgia Psychological Association and is careful to include disclaimers on her website that her consultations and training are for information purposes only and do not take the place of medical or mental health services.

Natali Edmonds, Psy.D., a board certified geropsychologist from Phoenix, manages her online business, Dementia Careblazers, in addition to being employed full time in a remote geropsychology position.

“My business started as a ‘passion project’ initially,” she explained “In 2017, I posted my first video online on the difference between dementia and Alzheimer’s and started my business officially the following year. Now I have 220 archived videos about caregiver stress.”

Edmonds wrote a dementia survival guide, offered free of charge and downloaded by 15,000 people from her website. She posts videos through YouTube on reducing caregiver stress, recording the videos through her cell phone and editing them herself.

“I’ve gotten 4 million views on YouTube,” she said. “The key to success using YouTube as a marketing tool is to be consistent and post once a week,” she said.

Edmonds monetizes her business by offering courses accessible 24/7 for caregivers along with live question-and-answer sessions offered six times a year in a group format. In addition to U.S. customers she reaches caregivers in Canada, Australia and Malaysia.

Edmonds and Koepp both learned the nuts and bolts of their online businesses by investing in the 12-week Digital Course Academy by Amy Porterfield.

“I did not get info

For 33 years, Joe Casciani, Ph.D., of San Diego, spent 80 percent of his professional time as a businessman and administrator, heading up two large companies that provided mental health services in nursing homes in multiple states.

In 2019, Casciani's entrepreneurial bent led him to the entirely new world of e-commerce.

"I wanted to move into an area where I had more autonomy," he said. "Although Medicare regulations were always challenging but not insurmountable, the challenges were managing providers' schedules, complying with documentation and ongoing recruiting. I wanted to create an online community of seniors and provide successful aging content to them."

He began the Living to 100 Club, offering individual and organizational memberships and hosted a weekly cable radio program for a year through VoiceAmerica.com, interviewing experts on various aging topics. He currently records podcasts and hopes to get advertising sponsors. He's written a book, *Living Longer is the New Normal*, does public speaking to community groups, writes newsletters and offers brief individual consultations to inspire and educate.

"Straddling the world of business is exciting. It has enabled me to learn and have fun," he said.

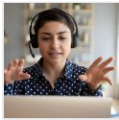
Edmonds wishes more people would become online educators because there are not enough people offering these services.

"The medical model of educating people through brief contacts and handing out pamphlets is distant and insufficient to meet the needs of the growing numbers of older adults throughout the world," she said.

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