

“Dancing together online”: Digital Pathways to Connection and Empowerment in Dementia Care

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KEY TAKEAWAY: Digital and hybrid mindfulness and arts-based programmes offer equitable, person-centred dementia care that fosters connection, creativity, and inclusivity for PwD and their caregivers, extending care beyond clinical settings into community life.

INTRODUCTION	METHODS	RESULTS	CONCLUSIONS	REFERENCES
The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected older adults and people with dementia (PwD), exposing the urgent need for flexible, adaptive care. Lockdowns increased behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD), loneliness, and loss of routine for PwD, while caregivers faced heightened stress and isolation. This accelerated adoption of digital and community-based interventions to preserve well being, sustain holistic, high-quality support, meaningful engagement, and social connection	A mixed focus group (n=10) included an international sample of PwD, caregivers, artists, arts therapists, researchers, and community practitioners. Participants shared views and experiences of digital and hybrid mindfulness and arts-based interventions during and after the pandemic. Reflexive thematic analysis, using a critical realist, inductively and deductively driven approach, was employed. Particular attention was given to Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) sessions delivered online to mixed intergenerational groups.	Participants emphasised that digital and hybrid programmes sustained meaningful engagement, social inclusion, and well-being while reducing loneliness, emphasizing the importance of flexible and adaptable dementia programmes. Creative adaptations highlighted the symbolic and relational power of “dancing together online.” Intergenerational sessions were especially energizing; PwD mirrored children’s movements, showing increased vitality and joy. Virtual formats enhanced accessibility for those with mobility challenges or caregiving responsibilities, while promoting public education, reducing stigma, and increasing dementia visibility.	Digital and hybrid mindfulness and arts-based interventions represent an equitable, person-centred care model extending beyond clinical boundaries. Integrating creativity, technology, community and intergenerational participation fosters autonomy, inclusivity, and social understanding. Post-pandemic, virtual and hybrid psychosocial interventions should be embedded within rights-based community care as essential complements to biomedical approaches, rooted in human connection and grounded in the lived experience of PwD and their caregivers.	- Gialama, M. (2023). <i>The “Mind Your Next Dance”(MYND) Programme: a mixed methods study of a mindfulness-based dance movement psychotherapy for people with mild to moderate dementia and their caregivers</i>. Vol. 2 (Doctoral dissertation, National University of Ireland Maynooth). - MacRitchie, J., Christensen, J., Fishwick, E., & Timmers, R. (2025). Digital adaptations to arts programme delivery for people living with dementia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. <i>Arts & Health</i>, 17(3), 208-225. - Shim, M., Kavanaugh, M., Lacson, C., Goldstein-Levitas, N., Chang, H., Zhang, F., ... & Fisher, K. (2024). Connected through movement: a feasibility study of online mindfulness-based dance/movement therapy for older adults with age-related cognitive decline during COVID-19. <i>Aging & mental health</i>, 28(12), 1676-1685.
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