There are an estimated five million people in the United States diagnosed with dementia, a disease associated with a decline in memory that reduces a person’s ability to perform everyday activities. One-third of the costs for care have been linked to behavioral and psychological symptoms, including a need for increased supervision and expensive medications.

The Solution

University of Michigan’s Helen C. Kales, M.D., and Johns Hopkins University’s Laura N. Gitlin, Ph.D., and Constantine G. Lyketsos, M.D., M.H.S., have teamed up to create WeCareAdvisor. This new web-based tool assists caregivers and long-term care staff with management of behavioral symptoms of dementia (BPSD) patients, and allows for tracking of underlying causes such as pain, sleep patterns, and inadequate nutrition.

WeCareAdvisor uses the “DICE” approach, a step-by-step process to assist caregivers with patient assessment and the management of behavioral symptoms of dementia. At the end of the assessment, a “prescription” is created for the caregiver that offers non-drug approaches for the behaviors dementia patients are experiencing, as well as safety tips and strategies to help reduce stress.

The project was funded by the Michigan Translational Research and Commercialization (MTRAC) for Life Sciences Innovation Hub. MTRAC works to “fast forward” projects that have a high potential for commercial success, with the ultimate goal of positively impacting human health. MTRAC has been made possible by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Michigan Institute for Clinical and Health Research, and the generosity of friends of the University of Michigan.
WeCareAdvisor is a tool that provides dementia behavioral symptom management.

Significant Need
One-third of dementia care costs have been linked specifically to BPSD symptoms. This cost includes the high turnover rate among long-term care staff due to lack of training to effectively treat BPSD, the need for increased staff time spent in supervision, and high costs of antipsychotic medications used to manage BPSD in nursing home settings.

Compelling Science
Non-drug strategies are recommended by expert organizations, but have not been used in standard clinical care due to lack of intensive training approaches. WeCareAdvisor uses the “DICE” approach, a step-by-step process to assist caregivers with patient assessment and the management of behavioral symptoms of dementia.

Competitive Advantage
WeCareAdvisor will enable nursing homes to reduce use of antipsychotics and other psychotropic medications by offering solutions to better assess and manage BPSD without medications. There are no other current programs or tools that have been developed for commercial use that use this method of treatment.

MTRAC Project Key Milestones

- Revise content for nursing home use
- Research potential partner companies for SBIR/STTR mechanism
- Carry out nursing home feasibility testing plan
- Begin long-term care feasibility testing plan
- Conduct higher-level stakeholder interviews
- Make necessary changes to WeCareAdvisor tool
- Compile, summarize, and analyze pilot data from care providers and stakeholders
- Work with partner company identified for SBIR/STTR on plans for addressing issues

Overall Commercialization

- Commercialization Strategy
  - Non-exclusive licensing and distribution to long-term care facilities.

- Intellectual Property
  - IP is copyrighted with “DICE” approach, while Caregiver Survival Guide and WeCareAdvisor are under trademark.

- Product Launch Strategy
  - WeCareAdvisor

- Engage Investors
  - Seek partner companies for SBIR/STTR funding, NIH funding for testing.

- Regulatory Pathway
  - Not subject to FDA regulatory requirements.

After very promising initial findings, there’s significant work ahead for us to translate the WeCareAdvisor into a usable tool for the nursing home environment. The MTRAC funding will have a major impact on our research agenda and team, enabling us to collect the necessary pilot data and provide mentoring on our path to market.