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As Dementia Cafés Boom Abroad, US In-Home Care Providers Should Take Note

By **Andrew Donlan** | January 28, 2020

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Globally, Japan stands as a useful example for Americans — and home-based care providers — wondering what will work and what won't as more and more people reach old age in the coming years. Its makeup, after all, currently consists of a 65-and-over population that accounts for nearly 30% of the country's general populace.

In the next few decades, the United States' age demographics will continue inching toward

Japan's, and the health care sector will need to adjust accordingly. The sheer number of people who are 65 and over in Japan has already demanded innovation, including a few intriguing trends that have subsequently come about.

Those trends include dementia cafés and senior-focused gyms.

“The dementia café” is a relatively new concept. In 2012, there were fewer than 50 in Japan; by 2017, there were 4,267, [a study from the Department of Geriatrics and Cognitive Disorders at the Fujita Health University School of Medicine found.](#)

“Dementia cafés are venues where people with dementia, their families, community members, and other stakeholders meet to interact and discuss each other's experiences under the coordination of professionals or those who know about living with dementia,” [a news release on the study said.](#)

The cafés were assembled in public institutions, long-term care insurance vendors, nursing care providers, adult day facilities, community centers, restaurants and

actual cafés. They primarily served those dealing with mild to moderate dementia.

Specifically, the programs within the cafés included private consultations, advice and mini-lectures for both those who had dementia and their family members. The study found that the more often these dementia cafés were open, the more often meetings took place.

Additionally, the more people that came to the meeting, the better the effect was on the patients and their loved ones.

“Dementia cafés may play a major role as a type of community resource where not only medical and care professionals but also community members, people with dementia, and their families, meet and cooperate,” authors of the study concluded.

Around 5.8 million Americans are living with some stage of dementia, according to the Alzheimer's Association. Specialized dementia care is providing major opportunities for businesses, and the café concept could be applied to a for-profit model.

“It's more than just demand in terms of the size of your census,” Felton Magee, president and CEO of Regent Healthcare, said last year during a panel discussion at the Senior Care 360 conference in National Harbor, Maryland. “One thing that has occurred in our business is our average number of hours per client, per week is skyrocketing. Dementia is what's driving this.”

In addition to dementia cafés, exercise gyms have exploded in popularity in Japan. In 2018, Japan's fitness industry had a record \$4.4 billion in revenue. More than half of that came from citizens over 60, [according to the Wall Street Journal](#).

The commonality between the cafés and gyms, though mostly for separate sections of Japan's elderly population, is reducing isolation.

Older adults flock to gyms to exercise their minds and bodies, but a key part of it is the community aspect. Some gyms are now specifically tailoring their capabilities around the elderly and their gym-going desires. It pays off in the end, given that the older population is more likely to pay for full-priced gym memberships.

Home-based care is also increasingly popular in the U.S. because of its ability to let people age in place while paying a smaller price than what it would cost to move into a senior living space. For the most part, [the same holds true for the adult day space as well.](#)

Perhaps the biggest issue with the idea of staying at home, however, is increased loneliness and isolation. Loneliness can increase the risk of dementia by 40%, according to a 2018 study [conducted by Florida State University's College of Medicine.](#)

Both of these popular Japanese solutions could help mitigate that and open up new service lines for providers.

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Before becoming a reporter for HHCN, Andrew received journalism degrees from both University of Iowa and Northwestern University. The former, believe it or not, was more fun than the latter.

