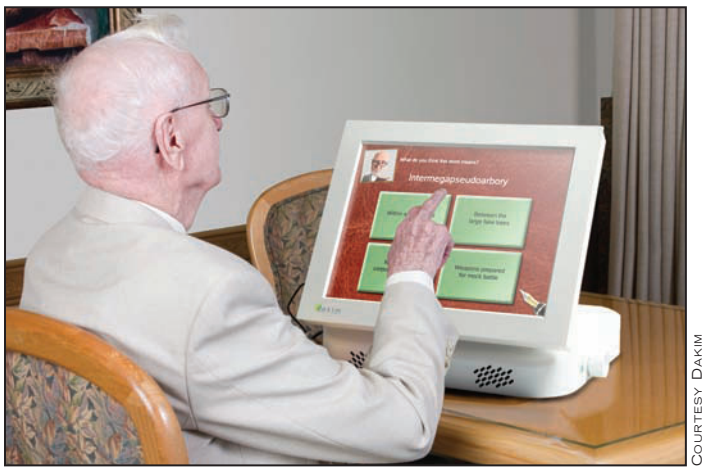

Courtesy Dakim

In the intervention group, scores rose from 10.4 at baseline to 12.1. In the control group, the same memory scores fell slightly, from 10.2 at baseline to 10.1 at follow-up.

Brain Fitness Games May Raise Memory Scores

BY ROXANNA GUILFORD-BLAKE

SAVANNAH, GA. — Regular use of a brain fitness program appears to produce slight memory improvements in elderly participants at 2 months and significant gains at 6 months, compared with an active control group.

Extended exposure is correlated with enhanced visual and verbal memory in the elderly, Karen Miller, Ph.D., of the University of California, Los Angeles, said at the annual meeting of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry.

The program, Dakim BrainFitness, uses games to exercise long- and short-term memory, critical thinking, visuospatial skills, calculation, and language.

The trial included 38 elderly subjects, 22 in the intervention group (average age, 82.4 years) and 16 in the control group (average age, 83.1 years). The program offers 300-400 activities and five levels of difficulty, allowing participants to engage in different activities each session. Although the program is computer-based, it is designed to be used by those with no computer experience.

Patients with Alzheimer's disease were excluded; those with mild cognitive impairment and age-consistent memory impairment were not.

Significant differences were observed at 6 months after randomization between the intervention group, which was enrolled in the program for the duration of the study (an average of 93.3 sessions) and the control group, which, after a 2-month testing phase, also was enrolled (for an average of 45.2 sessions).

Neuropsychological testing was done at baseline, at 2 months, and at 6 months.

After 2 months, preliminary analysis of intervention group subjects revealed better delayed recall for list learning. The intervention group improved by recalling 8.3 words, compared with its initial recall of 7.6 words during baseline testing. The controls' recall declined to an average of 5.3 words during the posttesting period from the initial recall of 6.8 words.

At 6 months, participants in the intervention vs. control groups were significantly different in their delayed memory domain score. In the intervention group, which had played for the full 6 months, scores rose from 10.4 at baseline to 12.1. In the control group, which played from month 2 to month 6, the same memory scores fell slightly, from 10.2 at baseline to 10.1 at follow-up.

The key finding at this point, Dr. Miller said, is that the longer a person uses the program, the more likely he or she is to improve. The results at 2 months were "mild," while those at 6 months were "most overwhelmingly positive," she said in an interview.

With numerous brain fitness products on the market, an audience member asked how to separate the legitimate programs from the "Elmer Gantries." A session panelist, Dr. Gary Small also of the University of California, Los Angeles, suggested using the same skepticism that should taken toward nutritional supplements. "We need more evidence before we get all excited about it," he said. ■

Disclosures: *Dakim sponsored the research. Dr. Miller is a consultant for Dakim, and Dr. Small is a shareholder.*