Spirituality is known to be an important contributor to the health and well-being of older adults and their caregivers. This study was designed to identify the extent to which intersectionality plays a role in the differences in spiritual experiences of older adults and caregivers. The research team used the 4Ms framework—Mentation, Mobility, Medications, and Matters Most—guided evaluation and outcomes. They implemented a virtual reality (VR) program that enabled veterans receiving inpatient hospice and palliative care to engage in activities that promote quality of life. The VR program, developed using AgeTech principles, aimed to solve real problems and empower health care options with multiple clinical applications. It was implemented at the VA Bedford Health Care System and was developed to meet current and future needs. The project development began in 2021, and data collection was ongoing as of the publication date.
began in March 2023. Veteran residents enrolled in inpatient hospice and palliative care were invited to participate. As of August 2023, 22 VR visits were conducted with 13 veterans. Preliminary data suggests VR can be used with a wide range of individuals receiving hospice and palliative care. Analysis of pre-post measures indicate improvement in mood (62%) and overall day (81%), and reduced pain. Barriers to engagement include staffing (e.g., availability), technology (e.g., VR technical issues), hospital procedures/policies (e.g., infection control, COVID-19), and patient factors (e.g., interest, symptoms). Facilitators include hospital support, interdisciplinary collaboration, and understanding of the setting and patient preferences/ needs. Although conception to implementation took two years, a VR program to improve quality of life for veterans enrolled in hospice and palliative care appears to be feasible and clinically beneficial. Experience has shown that flexibility, adaptability, and an individualized approach facilitate engagement. Best practices in the application of VR within the hospice and palliative care setting will continue to be evaluated and honed.