

# Brisk tech adoption sweeping assisted living

To the naysayers about the state of technological sophistication in senior living, consider these findings from a recent LeadingAge Ziegler 150 study, an annual joint project between the nation's largest association of not-for-profit aging service providers and one of the nation's leading underwriters of financing for not-for-profit senior living providers.

The rate of adoption of critical tech solutions is occurring at an amazingly brisk pace at the nation's largest senior living providers. To wit:

- Electronic medical/health records (EHRs) – 80% adoption rate across all operations;
- Point of care documentation technology – 93%.
- Access control/wander management systems — 77%.
- Traditional personal emergency response systems – 73%.
- Physical exercise and rehabilitation technologies' adoption – 63%.
- Care management and coordination – 55%.
- Medication monitoring technology increased – 45%.
- Automatic fall detectors – 36%.
- Telehealth/remote patient monitoring – 21%
- Telecare/telemonitoring – 19%.

What's behind all of this brisk adoption?

There are several stakeholders.



- **Prospective and current residents – who are now seen as the most tech savvy seniors ever entering post acute care. They're no strangers to computers, the Internet and social media.** And they are very smart when it comes to marshalling those tools to do everything from ordering takeout, an Uber ride to dinner or a doctor's appointment, doing FaceTime chats with friends and loved ones, and keeping abreast of the latest healthcare advice and practice. They're also, to many an entrepreneur's delight, early adopters on a whole generation of wearables from Fitbits to emergency call pendants. They're not shy about relinquishing a bit of privacy here and there that yields useful and relevant "news you can use" about everything from the number of steps they took on a morning jog, weight and calorie management and keeping tabs on every vital sign from heart rates to blood sugar levels. And by the way, don't skimp on the Wi-Fi.
- *Then there's the caregivers.* A mostly younger crowd who eat, sleep, and work surgically attached to their smart phones and tablets, not only sublimely comfortable but also coveting and downloading hundreds of apps aimed at keeping them connected to their work and private lives.
- **The providers themselves, increasingly seeking out tech solutions that manage their residents' electronic health records, keeping tabs on resident security and preventing wanderers and any number of real-time monitoring and communication systems aimed at keeping their facilities running smoothly and safely.** These technologies have blossomed from sophisticated passive detection tech like sensors to full blown emergency preparedness applications that employ military-borne apps like real-time location, GPS tracking and situation awareness. This is mind-boggling and, not to be base, but pretty "cool" stuff.

To residents and caregivers, tech is an infinitely yet alternatively personal and public thing; to those in their care, it's about staying strategically relevant while being operationally viable. It is a rich and bubbly technological soup that's always on high simmer.

Here's a look at some of the key drivers...

**Automation.** It's no secret that providers today are not exactly drowning in fiercely loyal talent. And with many grappling with slender staffs, it's essential to seek technology that helps everyone work faster, smarter and safer. This applies to everything from morning rounds, to facility maintenance and asset management, emergency response – even billing and reimbursement. "Automation in workflow and process have to be at the forefront with assisted living operators due to the lack of care staff in comparison to skilled nursing facilities," one observer has reportedly said.

**Business intel and analytics.** Assisted living operators have their fair share of number crunchers. Many dine on a daily dose of metrics. Keeping constant tabs on operational vital signs can sometimes mean the difference between expanding or closing doors.

**Electronic health records.** They're no longer a novelty. In this tangled world that thrives on partnerships and quality outcomes, EHR is no longer optional equipment. It's the centerpiece to most every single important clinical and strategic decision made today – regardless of what sub-sector you're in.

**Competition.** If your assisted living community does not fully engage residents with robust digital engagement or cultivate the means and the bandwidth to connect and interact with the inner- and outside world, you're

headed for Jurassic Park world. Technology has become a competitive differentiator.

**Mobility.** Today's long-term care workforce doesn't demand the ability to schedule shifts on the fly or send instant messages to supervisors, they simply expect it. Providers will skip such offerings at their own peril. These young caregivers are a dedicated and proficient bunch, but they won't stay around long without these tools and providers' incessant overtures toward provider infinite flexibility in work schedules and personal time.

**For the more serious drivers, assisted living providers who aren't bulking up on new technologies to meet a sicker and more medically complex incoming resident population are likely going to be playing serious catch up in five years or so.** Seniors, with all of their zeal for health and fitness, or likely going to be coming through the doors five to 10 years from now with more chronic and serious health problems than ever before. This will make it incumbent for providers to be ready to act more like, well, their skilled nursing big sisters. They likely will need to beef up on clinical staff that include more registered nurses, for one.

As one high level IT executive reportedly notes, "rising acuity also means a demand for efficient performance across staff, spread across independent and assisted living campuses with many more private rooms and square foot to travel. Technology and the use of applications that identify high risk populations help operators balance resources among their populations." Think measures like fall detection, resident behavioral triggers and patterns, and elopement prevention.

And as everyone who hasn't been living in a cave knows, big league medication management is going to be paramount. Experts agree the days of letting Mrs. Jones bring back bags of over-the-counter sleep meds and heartburn remedies from her corner drug store are going bye-bye.

Just where is all of this behind the scene future tech coming from?

Some of it, of course, is tried and tested applications that found their first guinea pigs in skilled nursing.

A lot of it, however, is popping up on a daily basis inside the laboratories of leading manufacturers dedicated to senior care.

Then, there are the incubators – those dedicated engineering nerds developing amazing, eye-popping stuff behind the walls of places like the University of Missouri's Aging in Place Project, or Front Porch, or the Vivo: Innovation for Well-being Center at the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, the nation's largest not-for-profit provider of senior care services ,or Leading Age's Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST), which claims to be leading the charge to expedite the development, evaluation and adoption of emerging technologies that can improve the aging experience.

## Future state

In five years, it's anyone guess how much what you're reading will bear out. Such is the nature of innovation. The Internet of Things. Silicon Valley. Et cetera.

One thing is for certain, those naysayers' ranks we mentioned earlier are beginning to thin. Think artificial intelligence, robotics and virtual reality. Think there's no application for that in senior living? Think again.

Use your imagination when it comes to telemedicine. Resident engagement. Dining. Housekeeping. Even road travel. I rest my case.

What makes all of this so invigorating and exciting is the level of energy, passion and interest in a field that elicited snores and snubs from bright young engineers just 15 years ago. Senior living is a growth industry, and some of the best and brightest are joining the ranks of the very people bringing untold and amazing inventions and innovations to this booming and exciting field of assisted living in particular, and senior living in general.

So strap yourself in. It's going to be a bumpy and very exciting roller coaster ride into the near future.

*Technology is revolutionizing senior care and early adopters are reaping the benefits. MyValueMed.com offers your residents and their families a dedicated online portal for medication information, billing, research tools, and 24/7/365 access to our pharmacists and service team. Accessed anywhere, anytime, it brings your residents valuable peace of mind. Contact us at [info@valuemed.com](mailto:info@valuemed.com) or [866-628-2583](tel:866-628-2583) to learn more.*