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Plymouth Place President Jay Biere Implements New Safety Protocols, Activities, and Technologies Amidst COVID-19

Jay Biere put many practices in place within Plymouth Place that have ultimately saved the lives of many of the residents that live in the buildings that he owns. He looks to keep making improvements in order to keep the seniors served by Plymouth Place safe.

Written by: Olivia Beaton

7/1/2020

Jay Biere, President of Plymouth Place in La Grange Park, Ill, has dedicated himself to making his facility a safe environment for both residents and employees. Biere has come together with residents, staff, the local community, and other senior living facilities to implement plans, protocols, and technologies that assure the safety and security of the most vulnerable population. From the beginning, Biere knew COVID-19 was going to pose extreme challenges for not only his community but senior living communities all over.

When COVID-19 began, Biere knew himself and his facility were going to have to act quickly and efficiently. The Plymouth Place community got creative and worked together to assure they had ample supplies and appropriate safety protocols in place. Biere stressed the importance of community during these unprecedented times, they started a COVID-19 campaign and were able to raise \$400,000 through residents, families, and their local community to be able to provide resources to keep their residents safe. iPads were also donated to Plymouth Place by gracious residents and family members as part of Biere’s efforts to strengthen communication and give every resident the ability to communicate with their loved ones and remain connected even in isolation.

Biere and his team implemented numerous protocols that proved successful during the pandemic. Every essential care worker and employee was required to get their temperatures checked daily as well as answering a series of questions. They also took advantage of technologies that allowed them to check health statistics on a constant basis. Cleanliness was and continues to be a number one priority at Plymouth Place, so they have taken advantage of needlepoint bi-polar ionization, which purifies the air and eliminates potential bacteria or viruses. This technology proved to be 99.9% effective in scrubbing the air within the facility.

Another precaution Biere took was dedicating a specific isolation unit that was painted with anti-microbial paint in a space that had negative airflow to eliminate the potential of airborne spread. The various technologies put in place were able to allow Biere and the Plymouth Place community to navigate through COVID-19 and he plans on continuing these procedures.

Plymouth Place, along with six other senior living facilities, formed a co-op, where they have weekly phone calls to discuss policies and procedures. Biere strongly believes that working together and building a bridge is the key to being successful in overcoming the struggles that the pandemic brought and may continue to bring. The group discusses lessons learned, ideas, and how they can come together to prepare and overcome the potential of a second curve.

Moving forward, Biere and his team have come up with creative solutions to keep residents safe, happy, and engaged. Plymouth Place has one on one enrichment experiences, their own TV station to keep residents informed, as well as fun activities such as a putting green and butterfly house. It is Biere's hope that with proper social distancing guidelines, residents will be able to enjoy the facility's new features to return back to a sense of normalcy in their day to day lives.

Though there is much uncertainty about the near future, Biere is ready to face it head-on. He says, "we have to be thoughtful, resourceful, and creative," in regard to operating his facility post COVID. "Everyone needs to be on page if and when the second curve hits. Covid-19 can be defeated, but we have to wise and do it together".



How Technology Can Boost Waitlist Engagement and Conversion in Senior Living

The ever-changing technology that supports senior living communities has taken a great leap over the past few months to keep up with the new needs for enhanced communication, cleanliness and new operational needs.

Written by: Fahad Aziz

7/2/2020

Senior living communities have limited capacity, which means they have waitlists. For community directors, it often is difficult to engage waitlisted residents in a meaningful way before they move in. That's a problem, because a lack of communication during that period can make the eventual transition feel more overwhelming.

And when it comes to prospects, generating interest from a website lead can be equally as challenging. Lead-to-tour conversion rates, [according to a survey reported by McKnight's Senior Living](#), hover around just 30% for most senior living and care marketers.

The good news is that technology has the potential to improve both issues. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has put a temporary hold on tours and visits in many areas, tech solutions can give prospective residents a real feel for a community even when they aren't able to see it in person.

Digital engagement platforms and voice technology, which are rolling out at more and more senior living communities across the country, can drive lead conversions and help future residents feel more connected to the community before they move in. Here's how.

Digital engagement platforms offer an authentic glance at community life

Most prospective residents rely on two things when choosing a senior living community: community tours and marketing materials. Both can offer valuable insights, but they can't provide a thorough sense of what life in that community is like – for instance:

- How many different kinds of fitness activity offerings are there in a day?
- How does the menu change from night to night?
- What are the social events like?

A community that has a digital engagement platform, on the other hand, can make its calendars, programming and community news accessible to prospective residents. Potential residents can see everything that's going on in the community in real time on the resident portal, as opposed to a static website that might not get updated.

A digital platform also can make it easier for senior living marketers to leverage community lifestyle in the sales process and make their community stand out. Because of that capability, this tool can be immensely helpful in a prospective resident's decision-making process.

Tech lets waitlisted residents make connections before they move in

For residents who have accepted a position on a waitlist, the waiting period can feel detached. The transition into senior living is a big social change – traditionally, residents haven't been able to start meeting other residents until they move in. And being unable to visit a community due to COVID-19 only makes this sense of isolation worse.

An added benefit of a digital engagement platform is that it allows waitlisted residents to engage with current residents before move-in. For instance, a social network feature can connect waitlist members to residents with common interests.

One community in Michigan already has seen promising results in increasing conversion rates with the use of tech. [Friendship Village Senior Living](#) in Kalamazoo, MI, recently rolled out the Caremerge Community Engagement platform, which includes a web, iOS and Android app, along with voice capabilities for residents.

Diana Duncan, director of sales and marketing at Friendship Village, says that waitlisted residents can use the technology to make friends with current residents beforehand, and those current residents can support the waitlisted ones during their eventual transition. What's more, these new residents start building memories and having experiences before they move in.

Without tech to facilitate these connections, there typically is no way for current and waitlisted residents to meet beyond tours and personal acquaintances. Especially during this period of social distancing, tech can nurture better social well-being for everyone through virtual connection, both within and outside of a community.

Tech enables senior living professionals to differentiate their communities

As the adult population ages, an estimated [two million Americans](#) will live in senior living and care communities by 2030. That's twice the 2016 total, meaning the senior living market will grow more competitive each year.

Because of this expected growth, the mounting challenge for senior living professionals is to differentiate their communities to engage both waitlisted residents and leads.

Technology solutions such as resident engagement platforms create a virtuous circle: They let adopters stay one step ahead of the competition and make the transition into senior living feel less isolating and more like a welcoming, ongoing orientation. This, in turn, drives more conversions, leads to happier residents and makes it easier to attract future residents – a win for everyone involved.



Industry, Lawmakers Agree: Assisted Living Needs COVID-19 Help

Assisted Living has been hit especially hard by the effects of COVID-19 and lawmakers are starting to realize just how extreme the situation is. The findings of a new report give new insight to the lack of testing protocols and the shortage of PPE among other needed in the nation's senior living communities.

Written by: Lois A. Bowers

7/6/2020

The fireworks came early on a long holiday weekend for those in the assisted living industry with the announcement Thursday of a [report and legislation](#) by three members of Congress aimed at increasing COVID-19 case reporting requirements and oversight of assisted living operators.

The report wasn't unexpected, as Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Edward J. Markey (D-MA) as well as Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY) in late April had [asked the CEOs](#) of 11 large senior living companies about their COVID-19 strategies and what they were doing to mitigate outbreaks when they occurred.

Responses in hand, comments made Thursday by Warren, Markey and Maloney seemed to be a mix of scorn and sympathy for the industry.

The lawmakers said they discovered that operators had "inadequate sick leave policies for employees that put people at risk, lack of routine testing and inadequate testing protocols, and shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE)."

"Their investigation also found that assisted living facilities are not reporting COVID-19 cases and fatalities directly to the federal government," a [press release](#) from the three members of Congress said. The statement could lead casual readers to infer incorrectly that operators are not complying with reporting requirements when,

as the American Seniors Housing Association [subsequently commented](#), operators are reporting data to local and state health officials as required.

But the lawmakers also said they recognized the industry's need for more funding for PPE, testing and infection control supplies, noting, for instance, that operators "reported facing tremendous financial and logistical difficulties in obtaining adequate PPE for their staff."

Other than some [funds to eligible state Medicaid providers](#), which would include a small percentage of assisted living operators, announced in June, assisted living hasn't been allocated any federal funding to fight COVID-19.

So now that Warren, Markey and Maloney realize what the industry has been saying to anyone who would listen for months now — that senior living operators need resources to battle COVID-19, too — it's time for them to convince their colleagues in the Senate and House of their discovery and then put their (our, actually) money where their mouths are.

How much money? Congress could start by reviewing previous calculations from the industry.

Back in April, ASHA and Argentum asked the Department of Health and Human Services to allocate [\\$20 billion](#) from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act to companies operating independent living, assisted living, memory care and continuing care retirement communities. At the time, the groups estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a \$40 billion to \$57 billion financial impact on the U.S. senior living industry over the next year.

In May, AHCA / NCAL estimated that one-time COVID-19 testing of assisted living staff members and residents would cost [\\$232 million](#). That's the price for one-time testing, not the routine testing called for in the legislators' new report.

In June, AHCA / NCAL said that assisted living communities needed [\\$5 billion](#) in emergency relief funding to pay for staffing, testing and PPE to fight COVID-19.

So beyond [suggesting requirements](#) in their proposed Assisted Living Facility Coronavirus Reporting Act, the senators and congresswoman should work to secure funding and other assistance to accomplish their stated goal of — in the words of Markey — "getting the test supplies and personal protective equipment they need to prevent outbreaks."



Georgia Law Brings Sweeping Reforms to Assisted Living

In light of the stress brought to the assisted living business due to COVID-19, the state of Georgia has introduced a law to bring essential changes to the state's assisted living communities. Financial stability and new certification requirements are among the law's key reforms.

Written by: Kimberly Bonvissuto

7/6/2020

Regulatory reforms are coming for assisted living community and personal care home operators in Georgia after Gov. Brian Kemp signed a bill imposing staffing, training and financial reporting requirements.

Peach State lawmakers said the coronavirus pandemic made the need for reform even more clear, but industry representatives were [calling for critical updates](#) before a Senate vote. The Senate version added COVID-19-related requirements.

Genia Ryan, president and CEO of the Georgia Senior Living Association, said the association worked with the bill's sponsors and the Georgia Department of Community Health to "help develop a meaningful law for the assisted living industry in Georgia."

"We look forward to working with the Department of Community Health on implementing the rules and regulations for this new law, which are good for the industry and the seniors residing in assisted living communities," Ryan told *McKnight's Senior Living*.

Under the bill, memory care units must attain certification and add staff, directors need to be licensed, staff training in dementia care is required, and fines are increased. Assisted living communities now are required to report financial issues to residents and families.

The bill effort was led by state Rep. Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta) following an [Atlanta Journal-Constitution series](#) reporting on allegations of neglect and abuse by caregivers in assisted living communities and personal care homes. Georgia Sen. Brian Strickland (R-McDonough) led the bill through the state Senate.

Key highlights of the bill:

- Increases in fines for serious violations.
- Additional nursing service requirements in assisted living communities.
- Certification requirements and higher minimum staffing levels for memory care units.
- New testing and licensing requirements for facility administrators.
- Financial stability requirements, and resident notification requirements for bankruptcy or ownership changes.

Under the bill's [guidelines](#), facilities have until July 2021 to meet most of the new requirements. Senior living providers were seeking additional time to create required training programs due to struggles in dealing with the ongoing pandemic. The state Department of Community Health, which oversees long-term care facilities, now will go through a rule-making process to establish the detailed requirements of the legislation.

The majority of the provisions in the bill relate to assisted living and personal care homes with 25 or more beds, but additional COVID-19 requirements — which take effect immediately — also apply to the state's nursing homes and require facilities to:

- Inform residents and their families within one day of a confirmed COVID-19 test.
- Provide COVID-19 updates to residents and families weekly.
- Maintain a minimum seven-day supply of protective masks, surgical gowns, eye protection and gloves for all residents and staff.
- Develop and communicate infection control and mitigation policies and procedures.
- Test all staff and residents for COVID-19 within 19 days if they have not been tested already.

- Have an epidemic and pandemic plan as part of a facility's disaster preparedness plan that addresses protocols for surveillance and detection, infection control training for residents and staff, staffing, testing and visitation.

In other coronavirus-related news:

- Rosella Bell lived through World War II, the Great Depression, 18 U.S. presidents and 9/11. She survived typhoid fever and the 1918 Spanish influenza. And now the 103-year-old Golden Living Center Sycamore Village resident has [survived](#) COVID-19.
- COVID-19 cases among Florida long-term care residents, including assisted living residents, [jumped](#) to 1,868 as of June 30, the most since the pandemic began. The COVID-19-positive residents account for 1.3% of the total long-term care population. Positive tests among staff rose by 134 in a day to 3,090, also a record.
- The Pennsylvania Departments of Health and Human Services issued updated [guidance](#) to ensure a safe return to activities, visitation and other events for residents in personal care homes, assisted living residences, nursing homes and private intermediate care facilities. Long-term care facilities will need to meet several prerequisites before proceeding into the official three-step process for reopening.
- A group of long-term care advocates in Washington state, including the Washington Health Care Association, formed a [coalition](#) in response to potential budget cuts of as much as \$220 million to services used by older adults and people with disabilities.
- Michigan is easing [restrictions](#) on visiting long-term care facilities for limited circumstances as the coronavirus pandemic continues. Visitation will be allowed only for residents in serious or critical condition or in hospice care, or visits from family members or friends who assist residents with activities of daily living.
- The Paragon of Madisonville, a Kentucky assisted living community, created a [hug station](#) for families to reconnect with loved ones during COVID-19 social distancing requirements.