BEYOND COVID:

Senior Living Infection Control in a Post-Pandemic World

Beyond COVID: Senior Living Infection Control in a Post-Pandemic World

As care providers, senior living communities have always been concerned with disease control and prevention among their residents and staff. Yet the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 brought this imperative to the forefront as providers raced to ensure the health and safety of those under their care.

Using technology, senior living operators can track symptoms and act accordingly to stay ahead of disease spread — from the common cold to flu and more.

This white paper will discuss how senior living providers are using technology in their communities to control and prevent infection in the COVID-19 era and beyond.

Preparation is paramount
HOW TO USE TECHNOLOGY TO START CONTROLLING INFECTIONS

As the COVID-19 pandemic took shape in the U.S., senior living and care communities were at the center of many of the coronavirus outbreak conversations, with operators, residents and families adopting a new way of life to prevent the spread of the virus. In addition to social distance practices and restricting communities to visitors, those who were able to track and document symptoms quickly were armed with data on which to act.

Yet infection control in senior housing is, of course, nothing new.

"The ante has simply been raised," says Travis Palmquist, vice president and general manager of senior living at PointClickCare — in three ways.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic creates a new dynamic for senior housing operators to address in infection control. It's one more illness to address, but it's also a wild card, with no vaccine and a still evolving understanding of what the virus does and how it spreads.

Second, it creates a new urgency to senior living's existing infection control efforts. It's not a new topic, Palmquist notes, but it is now front and center.

PREPARATION IS PARAMOUNT | HOW TO USE TECHNOLOGY TO START CONTROLLING INFECTIONS

Third, because of the severity of the virus, particularly with co-morbid older adults, operators face a new challenge: balancing resident safety with offering an attractive product to consumers.

"The dilemma that the senior living market is now faced with (is) going to be a tight-rope walk," Palmquist says. "You can do all kinds of quarantining, and isolate forever with extreme safety measures, and probably be very effective — but it's not realistic. You're not going to have a family member say, 'I'm going to move Mom into that community even though I'm not going to be able to visit for 18 months.'"

What operators will need to do, Palmquist says, is show families that their loved ones are safer in senior living than out of it. Sell the quality of life, and show how the technology tools that senior living operators have at their disposal, particularly around infection, prevention and control, can help keep someone's loved one safe and happy.

Prepare your sales and marketing teams to show the bigger picture, and prepare staff to use the technology that builds safety and trust.

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Travis Palmquist, Vice President and General Manager of Senior Living

PointClickCare

User-friendly for efficient results
HOW TECHNOLOGY SAVES STAFF TIME AND BOOSTS PREVENTION MEASURES

The steps senior living operators take for infection control prior to the pandemic are the same ones they are taking now, and the same ones they will take in a post-pandemic world. The stakes are simply higher. Technology tools can help senior living operators manage this basic yet vital three-step infection control process:

- Be proactive to keep infections out of the community
- When infection hits, isolate the spread
- Manage the infected resident

"We know that when there is infection in a broader community, such as a city, that there will inevitably be infections that make their way into a senior living community or a skilled nursing facility," says Brian Buys, senior director of clinical product management at PointClickCare. "Since we know that, we must stay incredibly vigilant about the status of residents and look for early signs."

Operators must protect residents, and that includes restricting visitors, Buys says. But it should not mean eliminating visitors. Technology systems like PointClickCare's ensure that efforts are stringent yet not draconian.

"(PointClickCare's system) is super user-friendly," says Chrystal Hawley, director of clinical services for Alpharetta, Georgia-based Oaks Senior Living, which provides assisted living and memory care services across nine communities.

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The PointClickCare infection control dashboard lets operators quickly access and organize all information about infections within a given community, with sorting tools that track everything, including:

Etiology
(source of an infection)

Types of infections
(whether viral or bacterial)

Specific infections
(such as UTIs and parasites)

Case status
(whether a confirmed case is active or closed)

Case confirmation
(whether a case is confirmed or merely suspected)

All of this updates "within seconds," Hawley says, giving staff members with so much on their plate an easier path to resident health and safety. The PointClickCare platform also gives operators vital information in trickier areas, such as the ability to log asymptomatic residents.

"It's all at your fingertips," she says.

TECHNOLOGY CREATES PROOF

Technology helps operators prevent, track and manage infection control, but it also gives them the documentation they need to show that they have taken these efforts at all. To that end, the PointClickCare platform is built around directives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"You have to be in a position to prove that you did all you could to minimize and manage the spread of infection, and establish records that you can lean back on and can use to help defend yourself is important," Palmquist says. "It's the ability to look back at the data to better plan and manage and prevent future or further infection in the first place."

Building best practices
CREATING A CONSISTENT, REPEATABLE PROCESS

Data collection in the service of infection control is not a one-time act. It is a continuous process best executed with real-time tools that bring actionable insights directly to operators and staff. Operators must consider how their technology platforms impact both staff and residents, and realize that a major piece of the value of technology in infection control is gaining insights not otherwise possible.

For Hawley and the team at Oaks Senior Living, the ability to identify and log asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19 has been a major win — and a major eye-opener at the importance of the application of human efforts upon technology systems.

"I think we've learned through this process that there are so many asymptomatic carriers for COVID-19, specifically, and with widespread testing we've been able to figure this out," she says.

The best practice, she says, is to document every underlying symptom as a suspected COVID-19 case, including cough, sore throat, loss of taste or smell and shortness of breath.

"I feel like that's the most important thing that we've been able to identify, and that would be the same with (other infections)," she says. "Don't wait to track things until you've had a confirmation. Without tracking, we could have a large spider-web of possible etiology. With tracking, the suspected cases allow us to nail down the specific (cases) and reduce exposure risk."

To do this work, operators must develop consistent but pragmatic practices that are repeatable, in order to "operationalize your policy," Buys says. When practices are built into a workflow, and done so at scale, staff members have an easier time executing them — a key element as vigilance fatigue sets in.

"Part of this is taking that best practice out of a three-ring binder and inserting it into the day-to-day workflow of the staff," Palmquist adds.

Preparing for the future

While the COVID-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence, communities that are prepared can best confront any outbreak that may arise, including flus that typically occur in the fall and winter and often have a crippling effect on resident health and occupancy. Urinary tract infections, respiratory infections, sexually transmitted diseases and other infections that are prevalent in senior living are all ones that operators can prevent and manage through technology.

To learn more about how the PointClickCare platform can help your community, visit **pointclickcare.com**.

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> Chrystal Hawley, Director of Clinical Services
>
> Oak Senior Living

Visit our website to learn more about how PointClickCare can help you increase your revenue, help you retain and attract talent, enhance your resident experience and stay compliant.

PHONE: 1-800-277-5889 (Press 1)

EMAIL: info@pointclickcare.com

About PointClickCare

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