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Building Occupancy in Senior Living Communities:

The Shift to a Care-Focused Model Using Technology

While the origins of the senior living market trace back about 30 years, it has not experienced significant changes since starting in the early 1990s. By the beginning of 2020, senior living communities were still offering a first-generation product that emphasized hospitality as its main selling point.

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed that, forcing communities to focus on outcomes of care.

According to The National Investment Center for Seniors Housing and Care, skilled nursing occupancy has fallen nearly 11% since the pandemic began. As assisted living communities work to regain pre-pandemic occupancy levels and normalize operations, they will need to shape their strategies around a care-centric model reinforced by technology, rather than the hospitality model of the past.

Healthcare providers must continue to appreciate that their communities are home for a population that has significant care needs and is especially vulnerable to infectious diseases. In fact, there has been a shift to more needs-based move-ins following the peak of COVID-19. Protecting the well-being of this population must be the first and foremost priority, with hospitality and extra amenities coming in a close second.

Going forward, the way that senior communities are developed, designed, marketed and operated will need to change to follow suit. There will certainly be increased investments in clinical capabilities, but digital transformation will play the leading role in enabling senior care communities to successfully navigate this transition.

To attract residents, it will be critical to demonstrate how innovative technology tools will facilitate high-quality care and will keep individuals' loved ones protected, safe and happy.

Here are the top technology innovations that will help facilitate the transformation to care-based models in senior living communities.

Point of Care and Mobile Technology

The complexity and scope of tasks assigned to caregivers in senior living communities and skilled nursing facilities continues to increase. Without point of care or mobile technology, there is no quick way for care staff to get an overview of their schedule, making it difficult to know which tasks to prioritize. Too often, care documentation is hastily gathered at the end of a shift or worse, staff are simply left without access to information that would enable them to make the best decisions for each resident.

Point of care and mobile technology ensures that care is documented accurately and in the moment. It empowers caregivers in assisted living communities and skilled nursing facilities to better manage their day by capturing and documenting the delivery of services and medications in real-time.

Technologies that allow caregivers to access and record information **'on the go'** increase their efficiency significantly by allowing them to distribute medications and document services in a fraction of the time previously required. For assisted living communities transitioning to care-based models, this is critical to enhancing the resident experience.

Finally, digital tools with simple, intuitive workflows allow senior communities to onboard new staff members in a shorter period of time. This is especially important for communities who are currently dealing with nursing shortages, as well as attracting and retaining the best possible talent.

'On the go'
technologies increase staff efficiency

Integrated Medication Management

Resident medication regimens in senior care environments have also become increasingly complex. As the use of multiple medications has increased, so too has the risk of serious side effects. As a result, the healthcare industry has seen increased rates of adverse drug events. In 2018, more than 280,000 people over the age of 65 were hospitalized for an adverse event and another five million sought care at a doctor's office or emergency room.

At a time when the healthcare system was already overwhelmed due to COVID-19, seamless, secure and accurate communication with pharmacies was (and is) essential. Optimizing integrated medication management will be a key factor for communities transitioning to a care-focused model in a post-pandemic world.

Successful medication management programs are comprised of two important pieces: the interdisciplinary team, including the physician, nurse and pharmacist, and the intelligent use of technology. By automating communication from prescription through delivery, electronic tools for medication management eliminate processing delays, late deliveries and discrepancies that impact resident safety. Additionally, integration technology enables senior care operators and pharmacies to easily access and review medication orders, refills and formulary changes in real-time, reducing the risk of drug shortages and adverse events.

Importantly, electronic integration with pharmacy systems also eliminates manual data entry, preventing human error in medication administration. Automated workflows allow staff to easily receive medication supplies and submit timely requests for refills.

Simplifying medication management through technology not only keeps residents safer and healthier, but it also gives staff more time for direct care activities.

Two important pieces for successful medication management programs comprises of:

Interdisciplinary team

Intelligent use of technology

Infection Control and Prevention Tools

As care providers, senior living communities have always been concerned with disease control and prevention among their residents and staff. But the coronavirus pandemic brought this imperative even more so to the forefront.

Technology is a key ally in the fight against the spread of infection. Using technology, assisted living operators can prevent, track and manage infection control by helping them adhere to a three-step process:

1 Be proactive to keep infections out of the community

2 When infection hits, isolate the spread

3 Manage the infected resident

A digital infection control dashboard allows caregivers to quickly access and organize all information about infections within a given community. These tools can track everything from the source of infection, the type of infection (viral or bacterial), the specific infection (e.g., UTIs and parasites), the case status (i.e., whether a confirmed case is active or closed) and case confirmation (whether a case is confirmed or just suspected).

This type of insight is simply not possible without the right technology. The continuous, real-time process of data collection in the service of infection control brings actionable insight directly to the caregivers and promotes a more care-centric environment.

Additionally, technology provides documentation to show that communities have, in fact, taken efforts to prevent and manage infection. At all times – but especially during a health crisis – organizations must be able to prove that they did all they could to minimize the spread of infection. Not only does technology establish a record that will help the organization defend itself if necessary, but it also provides the ability to look back at the data to better plan, manage and avoid infections in the future.

A New Era
for Senior Living

In 2021 and beyond, the senior population and their families will have higher expectations around safety measures, quality of care and clinical capabilities. Technology not only touches but enhances each of these areas. This new value proposition will be critical for senior communities to regain and maintain occupancy.

As we move closer to a post-pandemic reality, healthcare providers must solidify their digital-first sales and marketing approach. Assisted living communities relied heavily on technology to weather the pandemic and keep residents safe; therefore, it will need to be front and center in marketing messages moving forward.

For senior care communities to be successful in the long term, they will need to integrate technology into all aspects of care. The right technology and digital tools can help keep residents and staff safe, happy, and engaged, improving experiences and a healthier bottom line.

Learn more about the tools that'll help you attract new residents and focus on care-centric outcomes.

Learn More

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