

BUILDING A TECHNOLOGY SAFETY NET: SOCIAL MEDIA CAN SMOOTH HEALTH SERVICES TRANSITIONS

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Technology holds great promise as an enabler for quality of care and improved quality of life throughout a person's lifetime. As we age, technology offers advancements that many have come to take for granted. Electronic calendars allow us to juggle multiple appointments in our busy lives, and help to avoid over scheduling or double booking, then, alert us in advance of an appointment on our smart phones. Email may be used by patients to schedule a lab test or x-ray, or visits to the doctor. Prescriptions can be sent by physicians electronically to pharmacists, and electronic lists neatly aggregate dates, doses and names of medications.

Interest in the use of social media throughout retirement communities and in senior living residences is growing, along with the numbers of baby boomers who are making life transitions. Prospective residents and their families frequently span three generations, and are better informed than ever before. Quite literally, they are also better connected, thanks to tech's expansion into most realms of life today.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Much is being learned as life expectancies increase, and the Baby Boomers find themselves in the middle of caring for parents and children simultaneously. This generation is installing "learning" thermostats, carbon monoxide alarms and security cameras in their homes. They are using voice recognition and personal assistants to get weather reports, locate restaurants and play music. At the same time, many are contemplating retirement and perhaps downsizing as their jobs and families evolve.

There is great variability in peoples' facility and involvement with technology. For Millennials, social media is ubiquitous and the rapid pace of change a matter of fact. Text messaging is replacing face to face interactions and phone calls. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts offer real time interactive options. Many of their parents and grandparents have had to change their habits and communication patterns in order to keep in touch.

At the same time, peoples' lifestyles must be integrated with the tech tools, not governed by them, to be useful. Many senior citizens use computers regularly in their daily lives. They are interested in keeping current and improving their skills. For others, cognitive or physical limits may prove particularly challenging and hinder adoption of technology innovations intended to improve care and quality of life.

A BRIDGE TO LIFESTYLE TRANSITIONS

Social media can serve not only as a communications bridge between the generations, but also as a way to improve the connections between senior living communities with current and potential residents. An online presence can appeal to a new, informed population of residents who are shopping for services for

themselves or their parents. Posting regular calendars of activities and schedules of services can attract interest, within and outside the walls of the senior living community. This can allow the attractiveness of facilities as well as the range of clinical and social service offerings to be viewed easily in any setting. Offering a virtual tour online is excellent outreach and a time saver for everyone.

Learning how to incorporate social media into regular activities for the elderly can take some getting used to. Sharing photos and comments help keep people engaged with friends and family, and, perhaps new acquaintances. For many this provides entry into tech skills. They might next discover how easy it is to connect to a world of services online. Offering seminars which support and challenge people to use these tools provide real value for residents and families. Training sessions can be live and in-person, or online and even include interaction between consumers and providers.

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Increased responsibility for monitoring, understanding and improving patients' health status is a new role for senior living communities, and can be greatly enhanced through the use of mobile devices. Staff often react enthusiastically when equipped with tools that improve the safety and effectiveness of the care they provide. The technology safety net may also include connecting patients, families and care providers with a variety of communication platforms, and benefit your business and your customers.

NCN Technology is available to design and support social media and other tech tools for staff and residents in a variety of online and in-person sessions. NCN's experts will assist in the planning, creation and management of content to achieve your business goals. NCN can help build the bridges between retirement communities to senior living residences by designing and implementing a content marketing strategy to increase occupancy and satisfaction.

Authored by DIANE M. CARR, NCN Health IT Subject Matter Expert