



Could This Be The Key To Get from 80% To 90% Occupancy?

By Susan Saldibar

I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with senior living operators and others in the industry that end with one of us sighing and saying something like, "These are challenging times for our industry." But for Travis Palmquist, Vice President and General Manager of Senior Living for [PointClickCare](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner), the challenges are ripe with opportunities.

"This is an exciting time for senior living," Travis tells me. "There are lots of changes happening that can lead to great opportunities for those operators ready to seize them!"

Are ancillary services the sleeping giant of opportunity?

It's always good to hear positive words like that and I wondered where he was going with them. I've spoken in the past with users of PointClickCare technology who, among other things, use the platform to make sure they are keeping track of services performed for residents and billing them correctly. One of those areas that always tend to fall through the cracks is ancillary services.

So I wasn't surprised when Travis introduced an interesting opportunity to use ancillary services as a way to combat two troubling trends in this industry, namely:

- Chronic <90% occupancy
- Tougher than ever competition for residents

So, the idea is that if you can add revenue per resident (and make sure you bill properly for it) you can live with lower occupancy. But there is another, possibly longer lasting benefit that I'll get to in a minute.

First, here are the most popular ancillary services:

- Rehab services
- Diabetes management
- Cardiac health solutions
- Weight management
- Chronic disease management
- Personal medications management

My first reaction is, don't senior living communities already do all this? To a degree, they do. But today's consumer is more discerning and more demanding. They expect more and they want to have options to get more. So, as an example, diabetes management as an ancillary service will go beyond daily insulin checks and injections to a more holistic approach that takes into account the individual's profile, needs and personal history. Services that work actively with the resident to improve health, not just manage it are attractive enough for some families and residents to pay more.

Are ancillary services the key to expand beyond traditional “word of mouth” sales?

But here's where it gets more interesting. Travis is seeing communities using ancillary services to open up doors to a new sales opportunity. They are enabling communities to approach hospitals, practitioners and physicians' networks – essentially building a new referral network.

But don't you need to show outcomes and demonstrate how these services can lead to things like fewer re-admits? Yes, Travis tells me. And that's where technology comes into play. “You'll need to have technology that keeps accurate records of each resident and is able to produce detailed reports that demonstrate progress and can be produced and presented to prospective referral partners,” Travis told me. “Without a solid technology platform to support it you'll be spending too much time assembling reports manually. That defeats the whole purpose,” he added.

I have to agree with that, especially in an industry that already struggles to capture and bill for any services conducted outside the standard monthly fees.

From high 80% to mid-90% occupancy rates. That sure gets my attention.

And the upside, according to Travis, can be dramatic. “Imagine if you can pick up two to three more referrals each month,” says Travis. “That will make a huge impact on occupancy. I've seen it go from the high 80% to the mid 90%,” he added.

So, maybe instead of bemoaning these “challenging times for this industry”, it's time to tap into some of the opportunities they could bring to your community. And, opportunities that could get your community to a mid-90% occupancy rate would be a great start.

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