



## 71% of Residents Selected Their Community Based on This

By Susan Saldibar

Five or six years ago, the term “wellness” was a catch-all term; a bullet item on a hospital marketing brochure or an insurance advertisement. It had a good ring to it, but it was hard to get your head round what it really meant.

### **Fast forward. Today’s wellness programs are playing a strategic role in senior living.**

Here’s why:

- They help keep residents healthier, with fewer falls and better quality of life.
- They help communities maintain higher occupancy, by retaining residents longer.
- They create an opportunity to compete more successfully against communities with less effective programs.

I didn’t realize just how much wellness programs have evolved until I spoke with two people who are right in the middle of it all: Cindy Kasson, VP of Outpatient Services and Brian Boekhout, VP of Wellness Services for [Aegis Therapies](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner).

Aegis’ Total Therapy and Wellness Centers have created a seamless experience of highly focused therapies woven in with ongoing targeted wellness programs. And they are constructed to follow an individual through all life phases and stages.

### **Why should senior living communities get serious about a “wellness” offering?**

I asked Cindy and Brian to weigh in on how new concepts in therapy and wellness can be used more prominently in senior living communities. They tell me that there are two key aspects to the program that senior living community operators are impressed with:

#### **1. “Follow the Individual” philosophy:**

The “follow the individual” concept is a seamless progression of therapy and wellness services, offered on a continuum. “We bring an extension of traditional service delivery with much more evidence-base practice and wellness philosophies, out to the individual,” Brian tells me.

But how does it actually work? “We partner with hospitals, retirement communities, assisted living communities, and home health agencies,” Brian says. “So, as an example, a patient in a local hospital has ‘Cindy’ as their physical therapist. When

that patient is released from the hospital, they go back to their assisted living community. If we are partnering with both the hospital and with the community, and chances are we are, they know 'Cindy' will continue to be my physical therapist'. As they transition through phases of wellness, they still have 'Cindy, my physical therapist'. So, from continuity of care, it's virtually seamless to the individual," he adds.

## 2. Increased evidence-based therapy:

It might seem obvious that the dovetailing of these programs together will improve health and make for more active residents. But it's important to track the progress, not just talk about it, Cindy and Brian tell me.

"Validate services and track outcomes, such as fall risk," says Brian. "Assign a score after therapy assess, then after 3 months, 6 months, and a year of wellness services, assess again," he adds. It is important to quantify and deliver an outcome-based set of metrics as to how an individual is doing over time. That, according to Brian, is what brings value from a length of stay and quality perspective, and from a hospital discharge or readmission perspective.

So, there is a continuous quantification and qualification of services provided. The operator is looking at what impact an intervention had, whether it is therapy or wellness programs. Questions such as how it impacted satisfaction and engagement, or discharge and readmits. Did it impact fall risk, cognition, weight loss or gain, pain, etc.? As Brian says, "It's important to look at those metrics that have a negative operational impact, so that we can move the needle to improve health and outcomes and close their back door."

## The bottom line is an improved quality of life for the resident.

"When we look at therapy and wellness together, we're looking at an ability to, hopefully, bring residents to a higher functional level. That improves their quality of life," says Cindy. "A smooth transition after therapy discharge, and hand off to wellness helps us achieve that," she adds.

Of course, the nature of residents themselves are changing, Cindy points out. "We are hearing a lot that residents are looking for more active communities. They want the convenience of on-site therapy and wellness programs. These kinds of seamless programs provide that," she says.

## Is it fair to say that wellness sells?

Yes, if it's the right set of programs, according to Cindy and Brian. And this evidence-based model gives operators a way to open doors to the greater community around them. People are curious to see what they offer. If they have a good experience they equate it to that specific community. It gives the community market presence.

And, I would think it would be a welcome departure from business as usual. "In assisted living and skilled nursing, traditional activities have been bingo, manicures, outings, more bingo," says Brian. "Not that they are bad, but we're suggesting go ahead and do those things, but don't do only those things. Do other things that help with conditions; fall risk, anxiety, pain. Develop and deliver evidence-based programs. You'll not only improve length of stay, but also your marketability. In other words, help close your back door," he adds.

As a recent survey, conducted by Aegis Therapies has shown, 90% of EnerG wellness participants report their participation made them "more" or "much more" satisfied with their community and 71% of participants report that the wellness program was one of the main reasons for selecting the community. "This is a dramatic shift from a 'nice to have' to a 'need to have'. Especially with boomers. Today's 75 and under crowd has a different mindset. No longer are they satisfied to just say, 'I'm falling apart and can't do anything about it'".



This article has been brought to you by [Aegis Therapies](#) in partnership with [Senior Housing Forum](#).