



Can Social Isolation Be Solved With Technology?

By Josh Studzinski, Director of Marketing, Caremerge

Some 12 million older adults live alone in the United States, according to the Pew Research Center. Unfortunately, isolation and loneliness are not good for your health, especially when you're older. Studies have shown that individuals age 60 and older who report feelings of loneliness had a 45 percent higher risk of death than those who do not report feeling lonely. Isolated seniors also have a 59 percent greater risk of mental and physical decline than individuals who do not experience this type of social isolation.

Caremerge, a company that has developed an all-in-one platform that empowers families, residents, and staff in senior living, has launched an initiative that examines pacesetters in the field that have implemented new and innovative ideas aimed at delivering transformative experiences to residents, families, and caregivers. ([Caremerge](#) is a Senior Housing Forum partner.)

The purpose of the [Trailblazers In Senior Living initiative](#) is to raise awareness of challenges—such as social isolation—and opportunities—such as technological solutions—that affect family, community, and staff; deliver thought-provoking discussions that may inspire change in senior living communities; and provide a collaborative forum to share ideas with other executives in the senior living industry.

High-Tech

Many senior living providers are utilizing high-tech solutions to conquer isolation among their residents. In fact, there is now a growing and thriving cadre of companies offering solutions that help caregivers, residents, and families combat feelings of loneliness among residents.

An interview with Brookdale Senior Living's Director of Strategy and Innovation Andrew Smith comprises the first installment of the trailblazer series. Led by Asif Khan, Caremerge Founder and CEO, it covered a number of topics that the two companies are working on to address social isolation and other issues that put at the health of older adults at risk.

In fact, there are both high-tech and low-tech solutions to addressing this issue, says Smith. "For example, we're using Hasbro's Companions Pets, which are robotic animatronic cats and dogs. We found that for lots of our residents that helps address a little bit of social isolation by providing purpose—something to engage with."

Low-Tech

Khan pointed out that technology is not the only solution to minimizing isolation. “One of the things that I have seen is that if you give staff some time in their day to spend with residents, this helps too. It’s another way to think about it,” he says. Using technology to free staff time can lead to more personalized, individualized attention to residents.

“If they have the data they can make better decisions about it, then it empowers them more to say, ‘Hey, I don’t have to finish this paperwork. I can just check, check, check,’” Khan added.

Prioritizing Tech

Prioritization is key when it comes to keeping track of the latest technologies, Smith and Khan agreed. However, the question that one should always ask to oneself is, “What’s the real need of our residents or our associates or our family members and how do we keep ourselves focused on what their needs are,” said Smith. “It’s also important to remember that we’re still an industry in transition and we have a lot of associates who we need to bring through that transition and give them the right tools, support, and training to get there.”

Tech Expectations

Smith predicts that there will be a significant increase in expectations of residents around technology in the not too distant future. “Also, there is a hope that the infrastructure and processes will be in place to meet the expectations of the family members and associates,” he says. “Aging is going mainstream, which opens up opportunities to bring seniors out of the shadows and start honoring and appreciating them more.”

Smith points to the example of a popular television show hosted by comedian Steve Harvey, in which seniors display their many talents. “We have never seen a senior talent show on a national network before,” he notes. “This is an example of society’s obsession with youth, but nowadays, the seniors are living their lives to the fullest which in turn is very inspirational.”



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