



If You Buy Nothing Else, Invest in This

By Susan Saldibar

Nothing is more irritating to an operator of a senior living community, especially one that's been around for a while, than to be lectured about all the technology they should have that they don't. Worse yet is to threaten them about the new community down the street that is going to get all their business; once again, due to better technology.

So, if you've gotten this lecture recently, chances are a) you already know all this and b) no amount of finger-wagging is going to add dollars to your budget.

But how is this for a dose of reality? Do nothing long enough and you won't even have a budget to worry about.

It's a reality that was underscored in a conversation a few weeks ago I had with Phil Fogg, Jr., President & CEO of Marquis Companies, a leading provider of senior housing and care communities. Phil has experienced, first hand, how technology connects people to data in ways that help answer questions and solve big challenges. Phil tells me this is especially true about Electronic Health Records technology or "EHR".

So let's look at EHR for a minute. How important is it?

Pretty important. As Phil tells me, "If you buy nothing else, invest in a solid EHR infrastructure." (Marquis uses an EHR platform from [PointClickCare](#) -- a Senior Housing Forum partner). Here are 5 things a good EHR will provide:

1. **A hub for other applications.** Enables communities to pull data from more than one application. As an example, EHR is a driver for applications such as Electronic Medications Administration Record “eMAR” and for room-care automation solutions. “To me, the EHR almost becomes the Apple iPhone that enables you to get access to thousands of applications and you can choose which ones you want,” Phil tells me.
2. **Data analytics.** This gives you the ability to collect data that lets you analyze how your community ranks in areas like hospital readmissions, emergency department admissions, 5-star quality ratings, and so on. If you don’t have electronic health records it’s harder to put a clear performance profile together quickly.
3. **Seamless transfer of key information.** Enables connectivity between providers across the care spectrum (hospital, skilled nursing facility, rehab center, assisted living community). As an example, in a post-acute episode, a patient goes from the hospital to the skilled nursing facility, then back to the community. You need to be able to seamlessly send and transition information between each care touchpoint. Everybody needs access to that information as quickly as possible.
4. **Interaction with healthcare providers.** You are boxing yourself out of relations with providers, such as hospitals and physicians’ networks, if you don’t have an EHR system. It will be much harder to partner with health system providers who want to transmit or interface for purposes of information sharing. It will also negatively impact referrals, as it’s less desirable to establish relationships with those assisted living or community-based care providers who don’t have EHR.
5. **Ability to better compete in the marketplace.** Slow adoption of technology negatively impacts your ability to capture market share and to reduce the churn of the population you serve in your facility. You start off at a clear competitive disadvantage, Phil tells me. Fortunately he’s seeing fellow providers having more of those “aha” moments, when they say to themselves and their team, “We’d better do this”.

And, what’s great is that there are more options than ever as to how operators deploy EHR. One of the most popular today is the cloud-based model, which is the one Phil uses at Marquis. “I think PointClickCare really changed the market space because they were the first to go to a hosted model where you pay a monthly per resident fee,” says Phil.

But the bottom line, as Phil sees it, is that operators need to understand that EHR is no longer future technology; it’s a necessary tool for any provider that intends to survive, let alone grow.

“It’s hard for me to imagine in 5 years a world where, even in assisted living communities, an organization is thriving or even surviving without having deployed EHR,” says Phil. “EHR is a must. Just the cost of doing business.”

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