How Big is the Regulatory Risk for Assisted Living?

By Pam McDonald

Bob Bailey believes senior living eventually will be incentivized by insurers and pressured by regulators, litigators, and the marketplace to utilize resident safety technology like that currently offered by Blue Willow Systems. And, he warns, that mandates may come sooner rather than later.

Bob has provided leadership for both Silicon Valley technology firms and senior living. This unique perspective encompasses management of both high-tech and high-touch operations. Last September, he was asked to take on the CEO job of Blue Willow Systems, Inc., a Senior Housing Forum partner.

Blue Willow Systems' unique resident safety technology consists of sensors, proprietary algorithms, neural networks, and artificial intelligence processes that automatically detect resident falls and/or elopements as well as staff/resident movements. That bears repeating – without any intervening human action – Blue Willow detects falls and elopements and how the staff responds.

It also near-simultaneously alerts staff, records every such incident (along with staff response times), provides real-time location of both residents and staff, and delivers additional metrics that can be used to improve operations and reduce costs.

Status Quo Won't Do

"Where safety is concerned," Bob says, "the most important lines of defense are good people, good policies and procedures, and good training. I'm sure every community strives for that, but turnover among caregivers in senior living is at least 32% annually. Unfortunately, there's likely to be a shortage of skilled staff."

He continues, "Systems like the pull cords and pendants typical in senior communities, are antiquated. They never were very effective for memory care residents with cognitive limitations. Additionally, current tracking methods are unreliable."

"When every single push of a help button has to be logged by hand, omissions and errors will be made. The same goes for every elopement or every resident fall (assuming they can and do report each incident, which we know they sometimes don't). Blue Willow eliminates the biggest hurdle – human error."

Feeding a Data-Starved Industry

Bob calls the senior living industry "data-starved," but notes that the myriad analytics collected by Blue Willow Systems can be used to guide operational decisions. He says, "When Executive Directors pull up reports they can look for patterns and trends.

"For example, if they notice that a resident's step count decreased last week by 30%, they can have their nursing staff check for underlying causes. Or, if wandering and agitation increase at certain times of the day, they can correlate staffing accordingly."

Reducing Risks and Operating Costs

Because Blue Willow monitors all residents all the time, it eliminates the need for line of sight supervision and other overstaffing. It also streams data in real-time and stores it in the cloud forever. This objective evidence can be used to demonstrate regulatory compliance and help operators defend against litigation.

CNA Financial Corporation lists falls and elopements as the top two reasons for insurance claims. Blue Willow lowers overall resident safety risks in senior communities. The insurance industry likely will eventually offer premium discounts to motivate adoption of this and other safety technology.

In A Class of Its Own

Bob points out that there has never been a system like Blue Willow before. He provides the following criteria for those considering a new safety monitoring system. To be state-of-the-art, their platform must:

- automatically detect falls and elopement and simultaneously alert staff

- provide real-time local services (RTLS) rather than a Blue Tooth hub, which sends alerts when someone nears or crosses it

- operate using standardized, low-cost, mobile devices loaded with open programs (rather than proprietary software) so they don't become obsolete within two years

- be cloud-based that upgrades software automatically and seamlessly

- connect to other technological systems and enhance their functionality with a common alert system