

Senior living organizations ramp up technology for residents

■ CAURIE PUTNAM

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in earnest in the United States in March 2020, senior living organizations had to quickly ramp up spending on technology for communication and other purposes. Per the Senior Housing News, 80% of respondents reported an increase in tech spending in 2020 to help meet the demands of the pandemic.

Three years later, investments in technology within senior living spaces have not waned. According to the senior-focused technology provider It's Never 2 Late's (iN2L) Senior Living 2023: State of Engagement and Technology the use of technology to augment personalized care continues to grow in the senior living industry.

We checked in with three senior living organizations in the Rochester region to find out what's new technology-wise, not only for residents but for their family members and prospective residents.

Friendly Senior Living: Always looking at new technologies



Joel Snyder

Joel Snyder is the chief information officer at Friendly Senior Living, a non-profit organization that provides a range of senior living options, includ-

ing active retirement living, independent senior apartments, transitional care, assisted living and memory care, and nursing care and rehabilitation.

Snyder has been in the senior living IT field for nearly two decades and serves as a commissioner for the LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies, which is focused on the timely development, evaluation and adoption of emerging technologies that can improve the aging experience.

"Technology in senior living has been around forever, but it hasn't always been senior-directed technology; it's been more operations-focused," Snyder said. "The last five years we've seen major change in the industry with more resident-focused technology."

Snyder says people come into senior living situations expecting a smooth tech transition and the ability to use the same devices they had at home, like smart TVs and smartphones. Therefore, a big focus at Friendly Senior Living is infrastructure, like internet speeds and wireless connectivity.

By the end of the year, the organization also hopes to roll out an innovative member portal similar to such medical portals as the University of Rochester's MyChart and Rochester Regional Health's MyCare.

"Those types of portals don't really exist in senior living yet," Snyder said. "We're working with a vendor to bring it to market and believe it will be a game changer."

Both residents and their family members (with the proper permissions) will be able to use the portal to access things like lists of medications and allergies.

"Technology in senior living is changing rapidly," Snyder said. "We're always looking at new technologies and new opportunities. We're always asking, 'How do we provide the best care and services to the seniors we serve?' and technology is a big part of that."

St. Ann's Community: Making technology as seamless as possible

At St. Ann's Community, which offers a continuum of care that in-



Aaron Fields

cludes independent living, assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing, transitional care/rehabilitation, hospice/palliative care and adult day programs, "We try to make technology

as seamless as possible for people coming in," said Aaron Fields, chief information officer for the organization.

Technology at St. Ann's Community is designed to mirror a resident or elder's home environment. For example, there's affordable high-speed internet, satellite TV and gaming. The option of a telephone landline is also still available for those who choose it.

When the pandemic forced senior living communities into lockdown, the organization paired each resident up with a staff member who served as a "buddy" to provide companionship and facilitate video and audio interactions with family members.

"My buddy was an 85-year-old gamer," Fields said. "We played PlayStation [games] together."

The organization offers tech education presentations to its community members on topics like cybersecurity and uses real-time notifications to let family members (with consent) know when their loved ones attend recreational activities. Family members can also watch live streams of masses at St. Ann's Community's Parkes Family Chapel via YouTube.



Katherine Streeter

Many also take part in its touchscreen iN2L programming that offers content-driven engagement like games and music to support social interaction, cognitive and physical exercise and more.

Though Streeter has worked in IT at St. Ann's for over six years, her current position is new and was created as a strategic move by the organization to increase its research and use of tech engagement tools like apps, wearables, artificial intelligence, robotics and more.

Jewish Senior Life: Innovative technology for rehabilitation



Maria Fitzpatrick

that offers all levels of senior care from independent living to skilled nursing care on a single campus.

With twenty-two years working at Jewish Senior Life, Fitzpatrick has had an active front row seat to the growth of technology within the organization. One of the tools she is particularly excited about is the organization's investment in Bioness rehabilitation technology.

Jewish Senior Life is the only organization in the Rochester region that has both the updated Bioness H200 Wireless Hand Rehabilitation System and the L300 Go Foot Drop System.

These high-tech systems blend functional electrical stimulation, robotics and software-based therapy programs to provide functional and therapeutic benefits for individuals affected by stroke, central nervous system disorders and orthopedic injuries.

"These technologies are very exciting because you see results," Fitzpatrick said. "Especially with patients when they've had a loss of function that's impacting their daily activities."

The H200 system – which Fitzpatrick says has been used at Jewish Senior Life mostly for patients who have had strokes and traumatic brain injuries – has two main parts that communicate wirelessly with each other.

These parts are the functional stimulation support that the patient wears and the handheld control unit (microprocessor). Working together with the support of an occupational therapist, the unit is intended to increase hand function (like grip), increase or maintain hand range of motion, reeducate muscles, and more.

"Most people are open to it because they love technology," Fitzpatrick said. "They are very happy when they see their hand move when they haven't seen their hand move in quite some time."

Jewish Senior Life makes the Bioness technology available to its inpatient, outpatient and transitional care clients who are appropriate candidates for use (there are some contraindications). It's also available to appropriate patients at Jewish Senior Life's Atkin Center for Outpatient Rehabilitation, which evaluates new patients within 24 hours.

Some patients have come from as far as Pennsylvania to try the Bioness technology at the outpatient clinic.