

SUMMER NEWS

The Technology for Aging in Place⁽¹⁾

Leaving one's home, friends and the life one knows for a nursing home is neither easy nor often pleasant. But for many of the elderly, there has been little choice. When you cannot take care of yourself, you may need constant assistance to help you remember to take your medicine, to make sure you are active and to generally make sure you remain safe in your home.

In the last few years, a series of technological developments has given parents and their adult children some new options. Devices and Internet-based solutions are becoming available that allow caregivers to keep an unobtrusive, high-tech eye on their family members, ensuring that they're safe, healthy and well cared for.

If an individual can be safe at home, family relationships are enhanced and costs are reduced. New technologies are creating a revolution in the ability of individuals to stay at home.

Here are the technology items I found that could be beneficial to you and your loved ones.

Basic Home Monitoring

Philips Lifeline (www.lifelinesys.com) is a home-monitoring system that provides a basic but essential set of features for about \$38 a month.

When an emergency occurs, users push the button of a pendant that can be worn around the neck, alerting the Lifeline call center. An operator talks to the client through a speakerphone device to find out what is happening. If there is an emergency, or there is no answer, the call center phones caregivers and emergency medical personnel.

Pill-Taking

The elderly are often in danger of forgetting to take their medications, or taking too much. So a number of companies, including Philips, offer pill dispensing and monitoring devices.

Philips's Medication Dispensing Service (www.managemypills.com), for example, uses a tabletop device that plugs into both an electrical and telephone outlet. The machine can be loaded with up to 60 doses of medication, each contained in a small plastic cup. When programmed by a nurse or family member, the dispenser will remind users with a spoken message that their medication is ready. Pushing a button releases a dosage cup into a tray.

If, after 90 minutes of reminders, the button is not pushed, the device sends a message to a designated caregiver. The device and service, which costs \$75 a month, does not know if the pills are actually taken, only if the button was pushed.

Out-of- and In-Home Monitoring

In addition to assistance and monitoring in the home, there are services that can help seniors when they are out of the house.

The ActiveCare Personal Assistance Link (\$59 a month, www.activecare.com) resembles a cellphone. It has software that can detect when a user has fallen and will automatically contact a call center if that happens, or if the user pushes the device's Care button; it includes GPS technology that can locate the user. The device also functions as a simplified cellphone. Users can contact friends and relatives from a 20-number phonebook with four dedicated speed-dial buttons, or ask the call center to dial for them.

The center keeps a list of a customer's maladies and drugs, and provides them to emergency services; it will also contact caregivers when needed.

A similar device, MobileHelp (www.mobilehelpnow.com), connects a user with a live operator when the button on its small white unit is pushed. Equipped with GPS technology, MobileHelp (\$35 a month) can locate a user as well.

I hope that these wonderful technologies can be useful for you or a loved one that you know.