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The LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST) is focused on accelerating the development, evaluation and adoption of emerging technologies that will transform the aging experience. As an international coalition of more than 400 technology companies, aging-services organizations, businesses, research universities and government representatives, CAST works under the auspices of LeadingAge, an association of 6,000 not-for-profit organizations dedicated to expanding the world of possibilities for aging.

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Increasing Resident Engagement, Satisfaction and Quality of Life and Reducing Social Isolation, Loneliness and Depression through Hearing Assistance Technology

Categories

Reduce Social Isolation
Reduce Feelings of Loneliness
Reduce Depression
Increased Resident Engagement and Satisfaction
Increased Quality of Life

Organization Name

Commonwealth Senior Living

Organization Type

Assisted Living Facilities, Memory Care Facility

Organization Description

Charlottesville, Virginia-based Commonwealth Senior Living is an award-winning owner and operator of 22 senior living communities. Offering independent, assisted, and memory care lifestyle options, Commonwealth Senior Living takes a whole-person approach by addressing four essential elements of living a healthy, safe, full and rewarding lifestyle – Wellness, Engagement, Dining and Connection. For more information on Commonwealth Senior Living visit www.CommonwealthSL.com.

Eversound

Hearing loss is one of the primary challenges faced by today's aging population, with consequences ranging from frustration and isolation to full-blown depression and withdrawal from social activities. Many of us underestimate the toll hearing loss can take on our loved ones' quality of life and well-being. Eversound helps solve this problem by enabling residents at senior communities engage fully at group events regardless of their level of hearing loss. Eversound connects to any audio source and broadcasts sound wirelessly to all headphones. For more information on Eversound visit www.eversoundhq.com.

Project Description

Commonwealth Senior Living conducted a trial program with Eversound to increase engagement and interaction among memory care residents. Utilizing the Eversound system, a patented wireless listening system designed to improve hearing for older adults in senior living communities, Commonwealth Senior Living residents who had been severely disengaged began to interact more comfortably with staff and their loved ones.

Socialization Modality

Facilitated Communications and Conversations, Hearing Assistance and Enhancement

System Embodiment

Wearable, Head-Mounted Gear

Business Model

Predominately private insurance and private pay residents.

Implementation Approach

As with any new program, the implementation process was lengthy and required a significant level of research. Commonwealth Senior Living spent many years studying how to engage residents more significantly. That research led to many potential solutions, including the importance of blocking extraneous noise and connecting with residents. Enter Eversound. The company's headphones block out extraneous and distracting noise, allowing individuals to focus and engage fully on tasks and activities. Each set of headphones includes an easy-to-use volume dial, which provides the user with volume control creating a more comfortable and effective experience for residents.

Commonwealth Senior Living initiated a trial of Eversound in its Front Royal, VA community. Associates were trained by Eversound staff on the system and the various unique ways it could assist and improve residents' experiences. Associates identified several opportunities to introduce Eversound into their programming including: group activities, watching movies and/or television, one-on-one conversations with Associates or family members, readings of religious texts, and other programming experiences. After the training was completed, Associates began rolling out Eversound and working with residents on an individual basis so that they developed a strong comfort level with the new system. This approach

maximized the effectiveness for the residents and everyone involved.

Within a week, there was a marked difference in the way residents were interacting during activities but the most profound changes took place in memory care. There were two residents in the community's memory care neighborhood who had difficulty during meals. They often became agitated or distracted resulting in challenges when it came to eating their food. Associates tried using the Eversound system on those two residents during meals and the results were astonishing. By eliminating ambient noises and speaking softly directly to those two residents, they were able to focus their attention during meals. Not only did this ensure proper nourishment, it also put them in a better mood thus enhancing their quality of life.

Examples such as these began cropping up across both assisted living and memory care. Residents who previously had not participated in activities began attending and actively engaging. Family members were able to reconnect with loved ones who had difficulty hearing. Associates also introduced Eversound in programming events outside of the community including visits to nearby parks and museums which opened new opportunities for engagement and a more satisfying experience for the residents.

After the one-month trial period at Commonwealth Senior Living's Front Royal community, programming leadership (including the Vice-President of Resident Programming), community leadership, and others analyzed the results. Using the data collected from SMILE, a web-based communications tool used to track resident participation in programming activities, Commonwealth Senior Living and Eversound were able to see incremental changes to attendance and participation. For example, attendance at assisted living programming events increased by 20 percent. Additionally, behaviors like agitation which are often found in those with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia decreased. The data showed that Commonwealth Senior Living, with the help of Eversound, was improving the quality of life for its residents through the use of this new system.

It was decided that Eversound should be rolled out across all 22 of Commonwealth Senior Living's communities. This was a daunting task given the wide geographic footprint but both the internal team members and Eversound staff were up to the challenge. They outlined

an aggressive training schedule and module which was customized to the unique programming opportunities at the individual communities. Eversound participated in each module and worked with Associates during these trainings and programming staff provided best practices on areas that were (or were not) successful in Front Royal. One of the major benefits of these trainings was not only to hear first-hand how Eversound improves the quality of life for residents but also to demonstrate how easy it is to use the system. This was a benefit for Associates and residents, some of whom were wary of Eversound's introduction.

Outcomes

The rollout of Eversound across Commonwealth Senior Living's 22 communities was a success and within a very short period of time, there was significant improvement in resident engagement and satisfaction. Stories began pouring in from Associates and family members about how Eversound was enhancing the resident experience. There was a great story from Commonwealth Senior Living's Hillsville community of a married couple who had not spoken with one another in five years due to hearing loss. After trying Eversound, they both were able to carry out full conversations and a family member remarked that it was almost like seeing the couple fall in love with one another all over again.

After six months, Commonwealth Senior Living analyzed the SMILE data again to see the results of Eversound's introduction. Among the top findings included an 18-21 percent increase in resident engagement in activities, a 25 percent increase in resident engagement with Associates, a significant reduction in aggressive behavior in memory care neighborhoods, and a jump in family member satisfaction. Another benefit that arose from these findings was that there was an increase in engagement between residents. They were forging new friendships among one another thanks to the increase in participation at programming events.

These outcomes spoke to the heart of Commonwealth Senior Living's Core Values. Through Eversound, Commonwealth Senior Living was adding value to the lives of its residents by providing an environment of "dignity, respect and compassion."

Eversound has also become a significant differentiator for Commonwealth Senior Living. As the only senior living provider in Virginia to provide this service company-wide, there has been a great deal of interest from prospective family members and residents.

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

This initiative has delivered spectacular results for residents, loved ones, and Commonwealth Senior Living team members. However, the program did face hurdles that it had to overcome. The three most significant hurdles involved the study period, empowering a wide array of participants, and managing expectations.

Research and Study Period

When working to address the needs of seniors, especially regarding engagement and quality of life, it's critical for senior living communities to take a holistic approach. There's not one solution, but rather an integrated set of programs and procedures that should work well together to meet the personalized needs of a resident. Hearing loss is an important component of a resident's wellbeing, but not the only factor. Commonwealth Senior Living, like many senior living communities, has been following research advancements and conducting its own assessments on how to meet the needs of seniors. One potential pitfall that many providers and caregivers face is the notion that a single solution will magically solve many impairments. It's simply not the case. Rather, senior living providers need to test new potential solutions as part of their ongoing efforts to improve the lives of their residents. That's what Commonwealth Senior Living did with Eversound. After thoroughly researching the links between audiology and geriatrics, the company identified a potential program. This initiative with Eversound was intended to work with existing programs. For example, daily activities are tailored to various resident needs and interests. Eversound helps make it easier for residents to engage, but delivering the right activities and programs still matter.

Furthermore, Commonwealth Senior Living understood the importance of a study period at a trial community. As exciting as the potential solution was, it had to be tested first. Considerable time and effort was spent to identify the most appropriate trial community and closely track the results. This process allowed Commonwealth Senior Living to avoid the pitfall of expanding a new program too quickly and without the necessary support. That approach would have been a recipe for disaster. Rather, Commonwealth Senior Living used the study period to test and hone the initiative with Eversound. Lessons learned from that period were used to adjust and enhance the program when it was shared with all communities, increasing its likelihood of success.

Empowering Staff Members

Further underscoring the need for a study period at a trial community, one of the challenges faced by the program was discovered during that study period. Commonwealth Senior Living and Eversound understood that Associates at communities would be a key player in rolling out and tracking the results from this initiative. Loved ones were identified early as another critical audience. The study period demonstrated that these two groups were vital to the program's success as they experienced the most immediate benefits. However, Commonwealth Senior Living discovered that additional Associates should be empowered to share their observations and experiences about the program. For example, memory care coordinators and resident care directors often interacted with residents using Eversound and provided highly valuable feedback on the program and its results. Likewise, as any senior living provider knows, residents form bonds with various team members. It's often the programming team, but frequently residents build relationships with dining services and nursing team members. These groups were initially overlooked during the beginning of the study period. Recognizing their potential contributions, Commonwealth Senior Living empowered all Associates at its communities to share feedback and track for results that they saw. The whole team was made aware of the program when it was rolled out to all communities.

Managing Expectations

A third challenge the program faced was managing expectations, especially among loved ones of those residents who participated in the program. As Commonwealth Senior Living prepared for the trial period at its trial community, loved ones understood the goal of the program and many were hopeful about the results. Perhaps the biggest obstacle that Commonwealth Senior Living faced during this trial process was a certain level of patience. The team had decided that in order to be successful, we needed to create and adjust each component to the specific needs of the residents. It's important to remember the role of setting expectations. Senior living providers must strike the balance of encouraging hope, but remaining realistic about the potential timeframe of results. Communicating this balance early and often is vital.

Lessons Learned/Advice to Share with Others

When embarking on a program such as this, it is very important to be mindful of the unique and personalized needs of each resident. That can be a time-intensive proposition but by taking an individualized approach ensures a marked improvement in their quality of life.