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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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Enhancing the Lives of Seniors Through Use of a Daily Life Management Platform

Categories

Reduce Social Isolation
Reduce Feelings of Loneliness
Increased Resident Engagement and Satisfaction
Increased Social Networks
Increased Quality of Life
Increased Staff Efficiencies
Increased Revenue

Organization Name

Aldersgate United Methodist Retirement Community

Organization Type

Continuing Care Retirement Community – Life Plan Community

Organization Description

Aldersgate is a progressive Life Plan Community located in Charlotte, North Carolina, where residents live active, engaged lives with the confidence of having all future needs met in the same, and all-inclusive community.

Aldersgate is a distinctive 234-acre campus that reflects North Carolina's naturally wooded countryside and the history of our State. Residents enjoy easy access to Charlotte's rich urban amenities. Aldersgate offers choice, variety and value in an environment devoted to enriching the lives of our resident-neighbors and the community as a whole.

Aldersgate engages with city leaders and partners to advance wellness initiatives. And we are at the forefront of developing transformative centers of excellence designed to revolutionize the senior living experience.

Aldersgate offers 249 independent living residences consisting of cottages, homes, apartments, and villas, 92 assisted living residences, 61 memory care residences, and 100 health care residences. The mean age of residents in independent living is 86. We have a robust future residents program. We are currently undergoing a major expansion that will additionally provide 62 independent living residences, community center and amenities, and a 120-bed nursing center.

Project Description

Wellzesta, Inc. and its partner, Spectrum Consultants Inc., installed the Wellzesta Life platform at Aldersgate Retirement Community in November 2016 to approximately 300 residents and 100 staff members. The primary goals were to increase participation in existing wellness and activity programs and thereby enhance their wellbeing, enhance the sense of fellowship among residents and attain real-time feedback and from the residents on community services. The project also sought to engage residents and future residents in two-way, mobile communication. The project also emphasized holistic and preventative health, focusing on eight dimensions of wellness, including: social, physical, environmental, occupational, emotional, spiritual, financial, and intellectual.

Socialization Modality

Community App that offers Event/Activity Sharing, Video Chat, E-Mail, Text Chat, Digital Signage, Community Blog, Activity Calendar, E-Reader/Electronic Books, Art, Games, Exercise, Music, Facilitated Communications and Conversations, Friends Network.

System Embodiment

App running on iPad tablet for users (residents and future residents); Web App running on tablet, laptop, and desktop for staff; cloud-hosted back-end server.

Business Model

Medicare and private pay.

Implementation Approach

Aldersgate installed campus-wide Wi-Fi five years ago and sought a mobile communications platform that could enrich the lives of residents, create a culture of vitality, and attract prospective residents. Data collection and real-time feedback from residents were also important to both personalize each individual's experience and understand the changing consumer's needs and desires. Wellzesta/Spectrum staff conducted extensive hands-on onboarding, where staff and residents were trained in groups of 30. Residents and future residents received on-site, interactive training in the use of iPads, as well as the software.

The platform was rolled out initially to community staff, followed by a two-step implementation process for residents. Step one was introduction to iPad use

for those unfamiliar to the technology and step two being an overview of how to use the tool at Aldersgate. Ongoing technology support is provided by volunteers who provide a weekly "help desk" in a common area and by a resident "geek squad" that is beneficial in terms of platform operations and also reinforcing the sense of community. The software also offers online tutorials, search features, and a customer service support ticketing system.

Outcomes

We have achieved meaningful use of the software. On average, 75% of residents check-in daily and utilize the software. Time "in-app" has steadily increased with continued use.

Reduce Social Isolation

Because residents provide daily feedback (two-way and real-time) and staff responds appropriately, there is opportunity at the individual level identify address isolation and loneliness. This information allows staff to dig deeper into further details in determining ways to better leverage the influencers and meet the needs of those at risk. Resident stories and testimonials regarding the platform have claimed a positive response to easily accessible technology. For example, one female resident said, "Now that we have Wellzesta, I feel comfortable reaching out to friends about going to dinner – this used to make me nervous because I was worried about sitting alone. Now, it's easy to connect a group of us ahead of time – just text or face message each other about plans."

Reduce Feelings of Loneliness

Laurie Nortz, Aldersgate's Development Director, reports that residents who have recently lost a spouse feel more confident going to meals and events after being able to view that others have also registered for that event or meal. Aldersgate also utilizes the Wellzesta Life platform to track both emotional and spiritual wellness. The community's Chaplain also offers unique programs, such as spiritual walking through an outdoor labyrinth.

Increased Resident Engagement and Satisfaction

Aldersgate is currently tracking data from the platform to compare resident engagement before and after offering of a wellness rewards program that includes awarding wellness-centered goals and progress towards those measurable goals.

Satisfaction extends beyond the community and also has received positive feedback from family members who are “excited and impressed” that their parent is both using technology and engaging in more activities (such as water aerobics). One male resident said, “I set wellness goals and track my progress with Wellzesta. Our sons who live in California and DC are thrilled we selected a community so interested in all aspects of our physical and intellectual well-being.”

Residents report “extended access to more information and convenient features” that improve daily communication, allowing personalized, specific feedback. In a recent survey, 92% of future residents agreed, “Wellzesta Life makes me feel more connected to Aldersgate.” Ninety-five (95%) agreed, “Wellzesta Life will help me to pursue whole-person wellness and stay informed.” (breakout: 53% strongly agreed and 42% agreed).

Increased Social Networks

Aldersgate aims to increase diversity among its population, while proactively engaging in community-building. Through a unique friendship network via the Wellzesta Life platform, staff is able to visualize a social network map of the entire community. This precisely identifies those residents most at risk for social isolation, as well as those residents most connected who may be advocates or influencers. Then, the staff to has opportunity for a more qualitative discovery determine how to better leverage the influencers and meet the needs of those at risk.

Increased Quality of Life

The community is able to offer more and varied programs to meet the individual needs of their residents. And the community is perceived to be more advanced and technologically-oriented than competing local communities.

In addition to reinforcing healthy behaviors, Aldersgate seeks to increase resident engagement in community life. Increased socialization and connection among seniors has been shown to improve health and offer a more positive outlook on life.

Increased Staff Efficiencies

Daily, as part of the check-in process, residents provide their mood via one question, “Good morning “name”, How are you feeling today?” Each morning a team of

five staff members reviews the mood data and contact residents to better understand poor self-reported mood.

Communication is now predominantly electronic, resulting in cost savings in paper, while demonstrating commitment to environmental wellness. Communication has been consolidated in one platform, helping to eliminate departmental silos.

Increased Revenue

To reduce depositor attrition, Wellzesta Life was deployed to 10% depositors of the Gateway Expansion. Real-time, personalized communication is valuable, especially for future residents waiting for up to two years to move to the new expansion.

Challenges & Pitfalls to Avoid

Offer on-going training, especially with residents and even some staff who are not as comfortable with the technology. Users who have trouble seeing or keeping a steady hand as they use touch-screen technology may need additional support.

Lessons Learned/Advice to Share with Others

Get early collaboration and support from departmental staff management, not just senior leadership. Provide enough time and support to those who are unfamiliar with the hardware. Text and touch screen buttons that are larger for those who are vision-impaired and suffering from neurological limitations. Conduct smaller (between 10-15 residents at a time) onboarding/training sessions. Larger group technical trainings were not as effective. Find volunteers and residents who will be advocates of the platform on a daily basis. Convert some historical items (i.e. the monthly calendar of activities) into technical versions of something that looks familiar.