

VOICES

Ginna Baik, Strategic Business Development Manager for Senior Care, CDW Healthcare

In this Voices interview, Senior Housing News sits down with CDW Healthcare's strategic business development manager for senior care, Ginna Baik, to learn about how CDW is approaching the future of technology in senior care, where providers need to invest for that future, and the key areas where technology will thrive in helping senior users maintain independence – wherever they happen to live.



Senior Housing News: Tell us about your background in senior living. How did you come to your role at CDW?

Ginna Baik: I have been in this space of technology and aging for about 12 years. I started with a small start-up company where we were building a social platform during a time when iPhones and iPads were just being created, to see if older adults would adopt technology. My customer at the time was Brookdale Senior Living.

I was recruited to work for Emeritus Senior Living, which is now Brookdale, ironically, to be their national director of innovation resident technology. I

had been a customer of CDW Healthcare's at Brookdale and at the small start-up, and they wanted to build a business practice dedicated to senior care inside their health care business unit.

What's most exciting to you about technology in the current senior living landscape?

The thing that's most exciting is how artificial intelligence is weaving through all the different kinds of technology that exist. The biggest thing that technology can provide to one who's aging is the opportunity to not depend on other people.

For senior care, or home health, or any aging-in-place situation, figuring out how that technology can truly lend its hand is crucial. For example, when you forget something, allow the technology to remember for you, or when you have vision impairment, like myself, allow the technology to help you see better. Or even with hearing. Technology can help seniors in a way that, in the past, they didn't necessarily need it.

I think that as technology evolves and artificial intelligence recognizes who you are and starts to predict what you would naturally do without necessarily asking its assistance, it will grow incredibly important for seniors.

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As we age, technology will provide us with more independence, making us more empowered, because the aging disabilities won't mean as much.

It's often said that the senior living industry is slow to adopt technology. What's your take on that?

It's so true. Health care is about 10 years behind the rest of the world, and senior care is usually about 10 years behind health care. Where I think it's pivoting is that the competition for senior care is actually the home. If the home providers are going to adopt smart technologies, whether it's with voice-activated technologies, and having full Wi-Fi as part of the experience, senior care needs to match up if they're going to continue to survive and compete against the home.

What are the top tech priorities that you see for senior living operators in 2020?

We have a workforce shortage. It's starting to impact the entire ecosystem and not just in senior care. You're competing for the same worker who is considering working at McDonald's. Because you're all competing for the same workforce, the priorities of technology are going to be based upon how efficiently you can work with fewer people.

For the top technology priorities — and these all have artificial intelligence as part of their platform — what I am seeing is that smart homes are still a big piece of where I think all of senior care and those serving seniors need to evolve towards, especially in regards to fall mitigation. Just having simple lighting automation inside these homes will make those environments more safe and secure.

I think the rest is related to where the reimbursement is. Telehealth is right there. The fact that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is reimbursing and providing a solution for senior care providers to be able to reimburse [for telehealth] is going to be massive. Wearables go hand in hand with telehealth because of the remote patient-monitoring aspect of it, but I think the wellness, longevity, and all the things that we're learning with these latest outcomes will be an even bigger piece.

The fourth thing that I see that's starting to really evolve, is virtual reality. There has been a surge of depression and anxiety in both the United States and globally, and older adults are the most susceptible to depression and anxiety. The question is how to potentially decrease the use of opioids by using virtual reality. What we're finding is they actually do very similar things by blocking pain centers.

Lastly, another emerging technology is robotics. I think people are trying to look at robots socially, but the reality is there is a lot they can do relating to workforce; they can actually assist in the dining rooms, help with cleaning, help with medication administration to residents. There are so many use cases.

When it comes to technology adoption, we talked about how it's a little bit slower in senior living. Do you think providers should look to health care or hospitality as examples, or both?

Probably hospitality. Marriott and Disney and Google are really looking at voice-activated solutions inside of each of their buildings and in their experience. I think senior care is more hospitality than it is health care.

On the health care side, The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is a really big deal. Some of the senior care facilities are not subject to HIPAA compliance, so they can do a lot more of the hospitality technology. When they do have skilled nursing, then they're going to have to follow what hospitals are doing in terms of HIPAA.

For organizations or communities that are first starting to implement technology, how do you suggest they vet the technologies out there? There are so many of them.

I think they should always do a pilot, but not a small pilot. Many organizations that do pilots say, "We're just going to make one apartment a smart apartment." Yet they have 100 to 200 residents. That's not a great way to test new products and solutions. They really need to focus on an entire floor to give a better experience and a better sense of, "Will this work in my community?"

Have a more comprehensive pilot and give it a timeline in regards to how it's going to be evaluated. Once evaluated, make sure to set up action items or next steps to roll it out everywhere. When I worked for Emeritus, as an example, we piloted in eight buildings. After the eight buildings, we would expand it to 40 buildings.

What vision do you have for the next five years of technology in senior living? What's realistic for 2025?

The year 2030 is when the last baby boomer hits the age of 65. For the first time in U.S. history, we're going to have more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18. Five years before that happens, we should be in preparation for what I've alluded to in regards to the workforce shortage.

We have to build to attract a more digitally-native workforce. We have to be more efficient with the technology that we're deploying so that it really is saving time and increasing the overall workflow that currently exists. Right now, everything is so manual and analog.

Once we look at the workforce, and then look at the overall safety and security of our residents, and think about falls, and really develop communities that are safer and more secure, we'll be empowered to create a truly independent, purposeful lifestyle.

It's top of mind, but then the programs haven't evolved to develop it. Communities think, "My seniors aren't going to do that." We're beyond that. We really need to be much more digitally-engaged and digitally-empowered in the way that we're serving our residents.

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I think the investment here – and I'm going to speak straight to the CFOs – needs to be on flexible and secure infrastructure to allow all of these things to happen. The focus can't be on the price tag of that initial investment on infrastructure, but rather needs to recognize that if your foundation is not good, the technology applications will not follow.

For the operators with older physical plants, is retrofitting an option?

They can retrofit, for sure. Maybe due to the cost, they can't put in ambient lighting where it automatically turns on. But they can install smart plugs and smart automatic water shutoffs, or any of the things that would make sense with voice-activated devices, and those will actually work really nicely by just connecting the dots.

The other piece is the idea around building your infrastructure: Are they thinking about streaming entertainment? Are they thinking about having the right fiber with 5G? Being really open to the fact that it will be a faster ecosystem for their workforce is important. How much investment will be made? These are questions operators have to face.

Editor's note: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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