

Senior Living

INFORMATION OF INTEREST
TO OLDER AMERICANS

Going High Tech for Senior Health

Laughter is just one of the benefits of having a friend like SARA around. SARA (Stimulating Activities for Residents' Attention) also offers residents at Heritage Estates in Gering stories and photos, games and music, and can even help preserve residents' life history and favorite memories. Because of these mentally and emotionally stimulating offerings, SARA's company is usually in high demand.

"The residents really enjoy using SARA as another way of keeping their minds active and stimulated," said Marla Coleman, Life Enrichment Aide at Heritage.

The portable, free-standing computer unit is part of an adaptive computer system introduced to the senior living community as an effective alternative to prescription drugs for older adults living with early or advanced dementia. It's Never 2 Late (IN2L), a Colorado-based organization and one of Heritage Estate's Quality Partners, this week announced preliminary results of a year-long study on the technology's effectiveness.

Through the use of adaptive technology, all Vetter Health Services centers including Heritage Estates in Gering have at least one It's ever 2 Late System available for resident engagement. The IN2L touch screen computer system has a variety of content that includes sensory, reminiscence, brain fitness, physical fitness, and music specifically designed to engage seniors with very little prior experience with technology.

"It offers a little bit of everything, from memory games to travel and history information and videos," Coleman said. "One popular feature is the videos that were produced specifically for Vetter Health Services of people doing things that most residents enjoyed doing throughout their lives, like fishing, farming, baking, quilting. It triggers those memories of what they did in life."

Coleman said the unit has also been used to SKYPE residents in to a wedding or funeral that they were otherwise unable to attend.

Heritage Estates team members have seen first-hand the power technology in brightening someone's mood. Used as a non-pharmaceutical intervention when episodes occurred, residents can be redirected toward a game, favorite TV show, calming sounds and music, or spiritual content, depending on each person's unique needs, interests or skills.

"Even in the middle of the night, if we have someone who is having a behavioral, we can bring in the SARA and they can watch a video that calms them or play a game that stimulates their mind," Coleman said.

"Our mission is to help residents achieve the best quality of life using engaging, personalized technology," said Jack York, CEO of IN2L in a press release. "Residents stay engaged with the world when they have access to communication applications such as email, Skype, interactive music, games, art and an assortment of entertainment content."

York shared the story of a gentleman who spent his days in bed leaving it only for meals. Knowing he was a former pilot, the household coordinators showed him how to use IN2L's flight simulator. The last four months of his life were spent in the common areas and his family was thrilled to see him out of his bed. "It's great to see how this tool engages the staff who are closest to the residents," said Josh Hansen, technology director of Western Home Communities. "They create customized content based on what each resident likes. When someone is having a tough time, the caregiver can redirect the resident instead of relying on medication."

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