The invisible plan

Jun 4, 2021

William Morris advised us to have nothing in our homes that ‘You do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful’. In the case of Technology Enabled Care (TEC) in retirement developments, I would like to add a further adjective to that list: invisible.

While there is no doubt about the usefulness of TEC in providing support when we need it most, it is not always beautiful, and can sometimes provide an unwelcome reminder that adverse events such as falls are more likely as we age. Although it’s vital that the technology provided meets the relevant standards and can be relied upon to summon any help required, it’s also desirable for such technology to blend into our home environments - and this is particularly relevant in Retirement Communities.

It’s also incumbent on TEC providers to develop systems that offer much richer benefits than just simply enabling help in a crisis, such as connecting people to their families and communities, health management, wellbeing monitoring and prompts for day-to-day activities such as when the next yoga class is booked for.

Part of the issue is the range of stakeholders involved in creating retirement developments. In addition to the provider, developers, contractors and architects are all heavily involved in realising the project, and yet technology doesn’t always feature large in discussions and specifications, and often doesn’t have an ‘owner’. Particularly in the case of TEC, it can actually be an afterthought, rather than a core part of the service offer, given careful consideration in terms of the ways it can enrich the lives of people using it.

Tunstall has been established for over sixty years, and has a strong heritage of innovation in developing technology solutions to support independence and enable people to live life to the full. But we realise that although our devices may offer essential reassurance to those using them and the people who care about them, they should also be unobtrusive as well as appealing.

Our next generation of solutions, Tunstall Cognitive Care™, harnesses the power of our data-rich world to enable care to become more intelligent, person-centred and, importantly, invisible. Combining data from multiple sources, such as sensors, smartphones and wearables, we are working to develop an intuitive and highly personalised care model that will use this insight to highlight changes in behaviour that may indicate a potential deterioration in health or wellbeing. This enables early intervention and shifts the focus from responding to a crisis, to staying well and independent. Not all of the elements of Cognitive Care are yet fully in place, but we are working towards a vision where technology can wrap around the individual, enhancing everyday life and providing subtle but essential support should this be needed over time.

Many of us currently working in sectors associated with developing Retirement Communities will be faced with making difficult decisions about what and where our own final home may be in the next twenty years or so. So for our own sakes, as well as those people already living in or about to make the change and move into these properties, let’s think more about the way we would like to live in the future, and start to build homes that can facilitate this. The baby boomer generation is beginning to buy into retirement housing, and as such we need to design home environments that fully meet the needs and aspirations of the first technologically savvy consumer generation.

Technology is advancing exponentially, and therefore to remain competitive and appealing providers need to develop specific technology strategies, spending as much time considering TEC as they do location, build quality and design features.

As you would expect, Tunstall has always invested significantly in research and development, an continues to do so, but as we reach a step change in technology with the advent of 5G and a fully digital communications infrastructure in the UK, we are more passionate than ever about engaging with our customers to help shape our future products and services.

Over the coming months, we will be working with ARCO to create opportunities for its members to tell us what that want, need and expect from TEC, to help us all work together to create spaces that we would all enjoy living in in the future.