The Growing Sector of Technology in Geriatrics

How much does your elderly loved one depend on technology? When commenting on last week’s Consumer Electronics Show, the Wall Street Journal pointed out that the hottest product at the convention was not the iPhone or the latest BlackBerry Tablet, but a “smart” pillbox – a timed product used to dispense medicine.

For the 32 million or so Americans taking three or more medications a day, according to the National Council on Patient Information and Education, inventions like the “smart” pillbox could become a beneficial asset for a stress-free lifestyle. For those in their senior years, the product can make a prolonged home-life seem more probable.

To mark the rising interest in event-monitoring technology, General Electric and Intel recently announced the cooperative endeavor of “Care Innovations,” which will provide a greater variety of products to assist the elderly lifestyle.

These trends are mostly in response to people living longer. Moreover, the desire of the elderly to continue to live completely on their own has always been of greatest concern. Realistically speaking, it is also important to point out that no invention can replace the consistency of human care giving. Technology can only go as far as electricity, power cords, and limited programming permits.

Of course, I am not saying that technology is not relevant. In fact, it is probably most useful when used hand-in-hand with a caregiver whom is present and highly experienced like the ones hired by Home Care Assistance. Simple awareness of the trends in the health market can prove to be the starting point for better solutions for our elderly.

Letter from the Editor:

With the new year, comes exciting research and progress in the health and home care related fields. This month at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES), held in Vegas, the “hottest product,” according to the Wall Street Journal, was the smart pillbox – a device used to dispense medicine. For the 32 million Americans taking three or more medications a day, a number which will continue to grow, this is an exciting and beneficial technological advancement for the geriatric care industry.

In other recent news, Google Co-founder Sergey Brin is dedicating his time and money to find the cure for Parkinson’s. Largely motivated by the fact that he himself has the genetic mutation associated with higher rates of Parkinson’s, Brin is using his expertise in computer and data sets to find a pattern in this disease.

And to those of you caring for a family member or loved one with Alzheimer’s, recent research has emerged that reinforces the importance of caregiving for these individuals. Creating positive and emotional experiences for those with Alzheimer’s reduces distress and behavioral problems.

Please read on to learn more about the topics I touched on and how they will benefit you or a loved one!
Google Co-founder Donating Time and Money to Parkinson’s Research

I learn something new each day and today is no different. This morning, one of my friends forwarded me an article on the Internet powerhouse, Google.

Google seems to be everywhere these days. With a billion dollar empire there is really nothing that they can’t do. But what many people don’t know (myself included) is that one of Google’s founders, Sergey Brin, is intently involved in the search for a cure for Parkinson’s.

Brin has a genetic mutation called LRRK2, which is associated with higher rates of Parkinson’s. Since learning that he had this mutation, he has focused his efforts on preventing and treating the disease. Brin hopes that everything from his exercise routine, the amount of coffee he drinks a day to his 50 million dollar contribution towards Parkinson’s research, will significantly reduce his odds of developing the disease.

Genetic predisposition is only one indicator for the risk of developing Parkinson’s. He knows that by taking certain precautions he can reduce his risk of developing the disease. “This is all off the cuff,” he says, “but let’s say that based on diet, exercise, and so forth, I can get my risk down by half, to about 25 percent.” Add medical progress to the equation and Brin brings his risk down to around 10 percent.

Brin brings his background in business and Google-type methodology to his efforts in curing Parkinson’s. Instead of going the typical scientific method route, Brin proposes using the computer and large data sets to find a pattern in the disease, and going from there. He hopes that advancements in the medical field will see a progression similar to that of the Internet over the past decade.

“I know early in my life something I am substantially predisposed to,” Brin wrote on his blog. “I now have the opportunity to adjust my life to reduce those odds (e.g., there is evidence that exercise may be protective against Parkinson’s). I also have the opportunity to perform and support research into this disease long before it may affect me. And, regardless of my own health, it can help my family members as well as others.”

Brin is one of the few who actually has the resources to change the scientific and medical fields, but his story reminds me that everyone can do something (whether it is donating money or exercising more) to live a healthier life.
Caregiver Interventions Can Help Treat Those With Alzheimer’s and Dementia

With a new year, comes new innovations in the healthcare industry. The *New York Times* reports that recent research is stressing the importance of caregiving to those with Alzheimer’s. With no effective treatment for Alzheimer’s, dementia therapy is the caregiving performed by families, agencies or at assisted living facilities.

“There’s actually better evidence and more significant results in caregiver interventions than there is in anything to treat this disease so far,” says Lisa P. Gwyther, Education Director for the Bryan Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center at Duke University.

Research suggests that creating positive emotional experiences for Alzheimer’s patients reduces distress and behavior problems. Emotions exist even after cognition deteriorates, so changing things like food, art, exercise, or the aesthetics of a room can generate positive emotions. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that brightening lights in dementia facilities decreased depression and cognitive deterioration.

Additionally, the research is stressing the importance of a caregiver’s emotional state, so much that agencies are developing programs to provide caregivers with education and emotional support. This type of support is not only beneficial to the caregivers themselves, but to their patients as well.

Home Care Assistance similarly stresses the importance of emotional support to both the patient and the caregiver. This type of innovative research is an exciting start to 2011. Hopefully we will continue to see even greater breakthroughs in the treatment of those with Alzheimer’s and dementia.
Caregiver of the Month Spotlight: Sylvia Webb

This month’s Caregiver Spotlight honors Sylvia Webb from Home Care Assistance of Austin for her unwavering commitment to her clients as well as for her community involvement.

Recently, Sylvia’s client Ms. B was unexpectedly hospitalized. Sylvia knew that Ms. B would be concerned about the care for her dog, Nicki, so Sylvia offered to keep her while Ms. B. was in the hospital. She gave Ms. B regular reports on how Nicki was doing and paid her visits to the hospital to make sure that she was recovering quickly. This is one example of Sylvia’s selflessness, kindness, and client loyalty that is above and beyond what was expected of her. The level of commitment she provided her client was not only admirable, but inspiring to Home Care Assistance and other caregivers.

Aside from caregiving, Sylvia also crochets baby blankets for the neonatal unit of a local hospital. This hobby was one of many that set her apart from the other applicants in her initial interview. By nature, Sylvia is thoughtful, considerate and continues to enrich the lives of those she cares for.

Thank you, Sylvia, for all your hard work! You are an inspiration to us all.