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CONSUMER NEWSLETTER

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Transformative Potential of Wearable Technology for Seniors

So often, older adults' ability to remain out of an institutional setting and age in place at home hinges on ensuring their safety and monitoring their health and well-being.

In the coming years, advances in wearable technology may boost seniors' chances of living at home longer.

Laurie M. Orlov, the principal analyst at Aging and Health Technology Watch, looked at where the wearables market stands in her report (<https://bit.ly/2RT3wkH>) "The Future of Wearables and Older Adults 2021."

Thanks to technologies like smartwatches that track fitness, sleep, and other conditions, people have gotten familiar and comfortable with wearable devices. According to the Consumer Technology Association, consumers are increasingly interested in tracking blood pressure, heart health, and blood sugar levels.

In fact, 66% of those who started using a wearable did so to manage a diagnosed health condition, with more than 51% of wearables owners using such devices to address a diagnosed health condition, says Rock Health.

Wearables have the potential to monitor a slew of health conditions and share that data with healthcare providers. That said, doctors remain cautious and skeptical about such devices and resistant to integrating data from wearables directly into the health system.

In her report, Orlov points out that "Wearables can augment and potentially inform the annual checkup. Instead of the one-time annual blood pressure check, perhaps elevated in the presence of a nurse, monitoring blood pressure at home provides a level of accuracy that could help avoid over-medicating. Instead of periodic finger sticks to determine blood sugar levels, a blood sugar patch can indicate both the impact of certain foods and provide a timely warning."

Some ideas and questions from the report: Could wearables be used to predict strokes based on a person's motion changes before they occur? Or guide a Parkinson's

patient to get a new prescription based on gait changes? In addition, tracking and notification technologies could be used to alert caregivers of an emergency.

Some challenges around the adoption and rollout of wearables include accuracy of measurements, the healthcare industry embracing and integrating data from wearables, privacy concerns, and people's willingness and ability to use them.

Still, research, innovation, and funding in the wearables field plow forward, and the devices might be the thing that helps seniors live healthier lives and live those lives in the comfort of their own homes.

Post-COVID Care Models: Better Alternatives to Nursing Homes

Because of the immense number of COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes last year, we're all reevaluating how we care for seniors.

It's something Bill Thomas, a geriatrician, has been thinking about since the early 1990s. That's when he met and talked with an older woman who was living in a nursing home.

Though the facility's staff did the job of feeding, sheltering, and medicating her, she said she was lonely and hadn't made any meaningful human connections.

Thomas thought there were better solutions. His idea: deinstitutionalization.

His story and vision were covered in a recent *Politico* story, "Will the Nursing Home of the Future be an Actual Home?"

According to the piece, Thomas envisions something other than the traditional nursing home setting to care for aging adults.

Why not build clusters of ADA-accessible homes – small granny flats – around communal green spaces and give people their own homes, close-by neighbors, access to the outdoors, and greater autonomy?

Access to care – physical therapy, help with household and personal tasks, and nursing services – could be brought to residents.

Such a strategy makes for a healthier environment than an institutional setting. It also has the potential to bring a greater quality of life and better address people's physical, social, and emotional needs.

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Challenges to bring the concept to market include making it accessible to middle-income people, entirely revamp how we care for seniors, and change how care is paid for.

The concept is gaining traction.

For instance, plans are in the works to test the model with Signature HealthCare, a long-term care provider, and the idea has caught the attention of thought leaders in the long-term care world.

Read more at: <https://bit.ly/35oM0YA>

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