

Startup addresses assisted-living care

MosaicAssist develops software system aimed at streamlining care

BY LORALEE STEVENS, STAFF REPORTER

ROHNERT PARK — A Rohnert Park startup named MosaicAssist has developed a Web-enabled software system for assisted-living facilities it believes takes a major step forward in organizing patient care.

MosaicAssist, which recently joined the Sonoma Mountain Business Cluster incubator in Rohnert Park, is addressing the enormous and fast-growing market of assisted living. About 13 million Americans are expected to require some form of assisted living in 2020. During the past 10 years the assisted senior housing industry has doubled to close to 40,000 communities.

Americans currently spend \$12 billion to \$15 billion a year on assisted living.

The idea for MosaicAssist originated with Kent Argue, a securities analyst and former Internet entrepreneur, who set out to educate himself about a close relative's developing dementia and how it's cared for. He chose to do his research up close.

"I volunteered a day a week as a caretaker in an assisted living facility. The director was surprised by my background, to say the least," said Mr. Argue.

Struck by the complex layer of relatively simple tasks performed by the caregivers, he upped his volunteer work to four shifts a week and took a closer look at how information about each resident is communicated.

"Each client has wants and needs that change, and each functions on a different schedule. Families suggest certain services, physicians others. I was surprised to find there were about five different ways to assist the resident to shower," said Mr. Argue.

Caregivers, he noted, were likely to be given hasty or scribbled instructions when a change was in order, or, if they missed a briefing meeting, to be uninformed.

"A caregiver who is responsible for serving 15 or 20 clients on a shift can be forgiven if Mrs. Smith didn't get her coffee and Danish delivered at 10 a.m., or if Mr. Jones didn't get his Tuesday shower. But these omissions affect quality of life, and they can be largely eliminated if the caregiver has a clear and updated set of instructions," said Mr. Argue.

He points out that busy executives use a schedule, or have aides to remind them where they're going next.

"I wanted to give caregivers the same tools," he said.

The system he and his partner Petter Parelius designed prints out a clear-cut schedule and set of instructions for each caregiver on each shift.

"We know approximately how long each service takes, whether it's assisting someone to lunch, tidying up the apartment or giving a shower, so we can tell when more caregivers should be assigned to a particular shift, or fewer," said Mr. Argue.

The caregiver checks off a series of boxes as the services are completed. If a resident refuses a service, or exhibits unusual behavior, that's noted down.

"Both the supervisor and the oncoming shift have a paper history of how each resident has been treated. Best practice becomes the norm," he said.

With the approbation of the facility director, the partners piloted their system at the assisted living establishment, one of a national chain, where Mr. Argue worked as a caregiver, adjusting it as they went along.

It was an immediate hit with the caregiving staff on the afternoon shift, their first testing ground.

"We knew it was a success when the morning shift demanded it. If your system is resisted by the caregivers, it will never work," said Mr. Argue.

Now settling into the Sonoma Mountain Business Cluster in Rohnert Park, they and their six contract programmers will add the finishing touches before taking the system to market in about two months. They'll use a subscription model, charging from \$300 to \$400 a month per facility.

"Our selling points are clear. We offer documentation of all services, collected from the point of interaction, including the efficiency of the caregiver," Mr. Argue said.

"It's the kind of data that a corporate financial department can use to determine the cost of care, the level of care, whether residents are being overcharged, or whether the residence is undercharging," he said.

MosaicAssist, which is funded for one year by a private individual, would like to get several pilots going in the North Bay before approaching corporate chains.

Theirs is not the only assisted care man-

agement system in development, but Mr. Argue believes it's the only one designed from the patient up, not down from business operations.

Carolina Spence, senior marketing director for Oakmont Senior Living, the arm of Aegis Senior Living that is building Varena retirement community at Fountaingrove in Santa Rosa, liked the idea.

"I'm sure caregivers would welcome any kind of system. It would be very handy to have a check list, and really good to know what kind of day each resident is having."

Such information is usually entered in log books, she said, and changes in services discussed at crossover meetings between shifts.

"Anything that makes things more efficient and less labor intensive is valued. My one question would be, how much time is a supervisor going to have to spend entering data? In assisted living, everyone hits the ground running. There's very little time, or even office space, for data entry," said Ms. Spence.

According to Mr. Argue, data input is minimal. MosaicAssist puts in original data on each resident, and only changes in care and certain matters of hygiene are entered afterward.

"The system is menu-driven and intuitive. If Mr. Jones's doctor requests he be given his medication before dinner, the supervisor clicks one box. The system knows to when to schedule the service and how much time it will take," said Mr. Argue.

Although most services can be established or eliminated in one click, there is also room for the supervisor to add worded instructions, if necessary.

"Our pilot showed it to be a great time saver for the supervisor, not more work," he said.

Jerry Gladstone, former vice president of Agilent Technologies and the first director of the Sonoma Mountain Business Cluster, personally wooed MosaicAssist to become part of the incubator.

"I've played with the software and I think it's an outstanding product that's really needed. Petter Parelius is a very talented systems creator. The interface and ease of use are remarkable," said Mr. Gladstone.

"They're a wonderful asset to the incubator."