

Baby Boomers Benefit with Assisted Cognition Technology

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Alzheimer's disease costs American businesses \$61 billion annually -- \$36.5 billion of that total is attributed to the cost of lost productivity, absenteeism and worker replacement when employees become caregivers to family members afflicted with the disease, according to a 2006 Fact Sheet published by the Alzheimer's Association. While there are currently an estimated 4.5 million Americans with the disease, by 2050, the number could grow to 16 million. GPS (Global Positioning System) technology has the potential to reduce the cost of caring for Alzheimer's sufferers, which will benefit aging Baby Boomers, and the workforce that will be impacted by family caregiving responsibilities.

For example, researchers are partnering with technology- and health- related companies to develop new wander management technologies designed to preserve patient independence and reduce stress associated with caregiving. One such project aims to improve upon the Safe Return program for Alzheimer's patients that was successfully implemented by the U.S. Department of Justice and the National Alzheimer's Association in 1994. The project provides cognitively impaired individuals with an accessory, such as a pin or bracelet that uses GPS mapping software and cell phone networks to alert caregivers via e-mail when a patient has wandered out of a pre-designated area.

Another project currently in research and development is the Activity Compass, a device designed to memorize a patient's daily routine, and offer advice and directions when it determines that he may be lost or confused. Over time, the device will learn a user's typical schedule, monitor the user's actions, sense location, direction of travel, velocity of movement and so on. If it detects variations in a routine, it will decide if a prompt to guide the user is necessary. The device will be designed to learn from interactions with the user and adapt to changing behavior as the disease progresses.

While this technology could potentially have a revolutionary impact on the cognitively impaired community, it is still evolving. "A primary challenge remains in ensuring that devices are used effectively," said Patricia Bomba, M.D., F.A.C.P., geriatrician and medical director for MedAmerica Insurance Company. "Alzheimer's patients may not remember to bring a device like the Activity Compass with them, or they may refuse to wear a pin, bracelet or necklace." However, this technology still has the potential to offer the cognitively impaired a significant increase in the time they are able to live independently. And, for the patient who has difficulty remembering to bring a device such as the Activity Compass along with them, implantable RFID technology is on the horizon that could provide patients with similar assistance, but without the need for the patient to remember the device.

In the future, more and more cutting-edge technologies will reach the market that are not covered by traditional long term care insurance policies on the market today that require patients to pay for services up front, and then submit receipts to the insurer for approval and, hopefully, reimbursement. That's why MedAmerica developed an affordable new type of long term care insurance policy that guarantees a cash benefit for the insured to use however he decides throughout his benefit eligibility. MedAmerica's CareDirections(R) Simplicity product is unique in that an insured could use benefits to purchase whatever is needed with no restrictions.

MedAmerica Insurance Company and MedAmerica Insurance Company of New York are the long term care subsidiaries of a \$5 billion not-for-profit health insurer that finances and delivers health care to more than 2 million people in New York State. With long term care insurance its singular focus, MedAmerica brings a depth of expertise to provide solutions for long term care financing by creating simple to understand and easy to use products, maintaining fiscal responsibility, shaping public policy and delivering on its promises.

Patricia Bomba, M.D., practiced internal medicine, primarily geriatrics, for many years before becoming the medical director for MedAmerica. She is a member of the Review Committee of the National Quality Forum's "Framework and Preferred Practices for a Palliative and Hospice Care Quality" project, the New York State representative for the National POLST Paradigm Task Force, and the Physician's Advisory Panel of the Case Management Society of America. Dr. Bomba served as a New York State delegate to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging and is a member of the MSSNY Ethics Committee. She serves on the board of directors of the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and is currently on the Executive Committee for the New York State Coalition on Elder Abuse. Highly regarded in her specialty, Dr. Bomba is considered to be a medical expert on the hidden epidemic of Elder Abuse and palliative care.

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