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Touch-Screen Technology—Benefits and Use in the Geriatric Market

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Touch-screen devices are part of the answer to bridging the digital divide for seniors. Technology is advancing very quickly, and while it may be easy for those of us who have grown up with computers to use them and adapt to them, what about elders who have never used a mouse before or sent an email? Where does someone start for the first time they are sitting in front of a computer?

Touch screens are readily available as phones, as tablets such as the iPad, and we are beginning to see them on desktop and laptop computers. The ease of use is a major draw; no longer requiring a mouse to navigate, simply select a destination with your finger. Touch screens are making computers easier for seniors to use with large displays and the ability to adjust font size, brightness and contrast so that it is customized for the user.

Other adaptations that help seniors use computers include voice recognition where the user can simply talk to the computer. There are also safety features being built into systems specifically for seniors, including the ability to have a "safe" list for email and filters on websites that disable external links.

The benefits of having touch-screen technology in the home are endless, but in order for the technology to be beneficial, the user must learn and adapt to the available features and functions. With devices that have a telehealth feature to them for monitoring health conditions, a visiting nurse may train the user to navigate the touch-screen device to meet that individual's needs in the home. Other available resources for seniors to learn their device in the home are provided by volunteers arranged by towns, various organizations and local senior centers. It is also worthwhile to check with the vendors themselves to see if they offer training and support.

Following are some examples of computers and interfaces built specifically for seniors.

Care Innovations Guide
http://www.careinnovations.com/products/ guide-disease-management

Care Innovations Connect
http://www.careinnovations.com/products/con- nect-elderly-independent-living

GrandCare Systems
http://grandcare.com/

It's Never 2 Late
http://www.in2l.com/index.cfm

Telikin
http://www.telikin.com/

Linked Senior
http://www.linkedsenior.com/

Family Health Network
http://www.familyhealthnetwork.com/home/index. php/home

Once the adoption occurs and the senior is comfortable with the device, the assistance may begin. Reminders can be set up to alert the seniors to take their medication at specific times, possibly preventing them from forgetting. Communication capabilities are also increased, allowing the seniors to connect with their physicians, their caregivers and, equally as important, their families. Touch screens coupled with graphical/icon-driven interfaces make computers and computer-driven applications, like those listed above, easier and more accessible to seniors.

Technology should assist everyone, including seniors and their families, to stay connected and feel supported. Elder-friendly computer systems, such as touch screens, provide a growing number of benefits to seniors that could support them living independently longer at home. ■