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Personal
Connected
Health
Alliance

HEALTHY LONGEVITY Caregiving



Adding years to life expectancy has been a great achievement of modern society thanks to advances in public health and healthcare. Trends now show that many people born today will live into their 90s and beyond. The 80 and older age group is the fastest growing population demographic in many nations and at a global level.¹ At the same time, birth rates have been declining so that by 2033 the number of adults age 65 and older will outnumber those under 18 for the first time in the United States.² A similar trend is occurring or has already surpassed this threshold in other parts of the world. The shift to a larger proportion of older adults will require a new model of **caregiving** that can support an aging population to achieve healthy and thriving longevity but also sustain the health and wellness choices of the family, friends, neighbors and community members who provide unpaid care.

An estimated 5 out of every 30 people provide some level of unpaid support and care for older adults in the US; this number will continue to increase in the coming years.³ The average caregiver today is 49 years old and caring for a relative, usually a parent or parent-in-law. However, one in ten are caring for a spouse and around 7% are themselves over the age of 75.³ These statistics make it clear that caregivers are in need of support as they take on the increased responsibilities of caring for a family member while still maintaining their own jobs and family duties. Caregivers of dementia patients have been shown to have higher rates of anxiety, stress, and depression and caregivers report spending less time and effort on their own health-promoting behaviors.⁴ In addition, many caregivers are unfamiliar with the tasks and skills necessary for providing care, medication, treatment routines and understanding Medicare benefits. Caregivers have unique informational needs, care

coordination challenges, and require support in their own social lives and daily tasks. Fortunately connected health and digital tools have the potential to assist in many of these aspects of the caregiving role.

There are a number of areas where digital and connected health technologies can provide caregivers with the new skills and knowledge they need. Educational content on caregiving topics can be delivered through online platforms or apps that provide training, online community support networks for social support and recommendations for caregivers. Distance education courses (such as CareAcademy or Ceresti Health) can provide skills training and live coaching for caregivers. Other websites provide resources for caregivers on a range of topics from financial management, navigating Medicare, interventions and recommended practices in caring for older adults (Daughterhood, Daily Caring and Caring.com are examples).

Software, apps, and digital platforms are also able to help family members, neighbors and friends to collaborate, coordinate and share daily caregiving tasks. These tools provide a shared platform accessible by all caregivers of an individual to send updates, reminders, and notifications on daily tasks, visits, needs, and changes in the status of the person receiving care. Many of these digital tools also provide a centralized area for storing health records, medical history, medication schedules and appointments, and provide educational resources on care procedures and recommendations for specific conditions. Caring in Place, Lotsa Helping Hands, and Cariloop are examples of these care coordination tools that can reduce caregiver burden by sharing day-to-day responsibilities of the caregiver role.

When additional help is needed outside of the network of unpaid caregivers, home health agencies are increasingly using connected health applications to enable customers to hire in-home assistance, to maintain communication and coordination between paid caregivers and family members and to manage personalized reminders, schedules and routines. Honor, Hometeam and Carelinx are examples of products that connect to home health agencies and other services in various cities in the US. These have apps for streamlining communication, security and coordination.

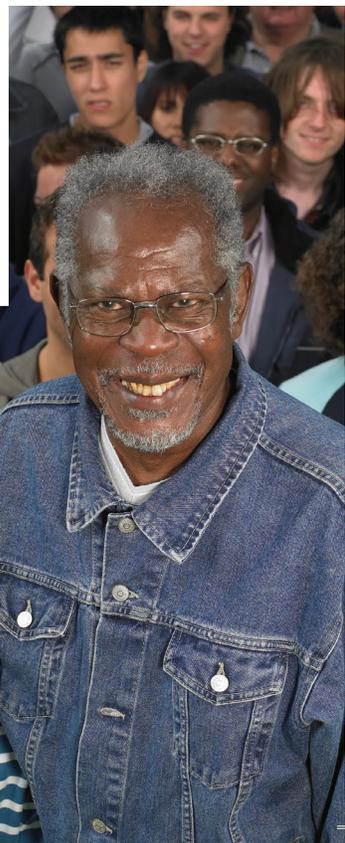
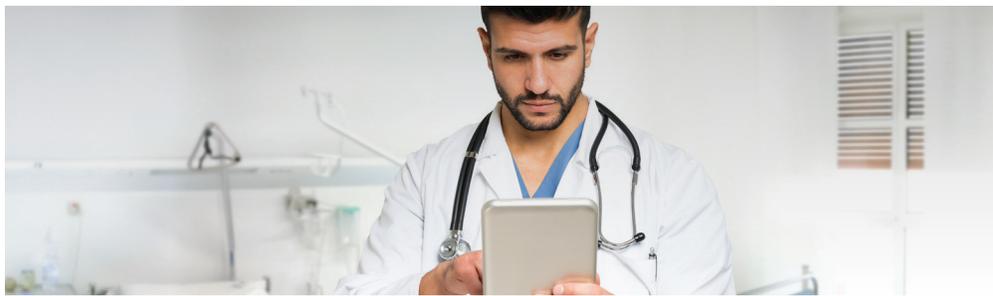
There are a number of connected health tools to help monitor health indicators and the home environment for independently living older adults that can alert caregivers to situations that need additional attention. Remote patient monitoring technology can collect vital signs such as heart rate, glucose levels, or blood pressure in the home and transmit this information to a healthcare team or caregiver. There are even wearable sensors embedded in clothes, such as Siren Care socks for monitoring early indicators of diabetic foot problems. Smart pill boxes, such as Pilldrill or EllieGrid signal a patient when it is time for medication and sends alerts to caregivers if a dose is missed. Emergency call buttons and wearable alert sensors can not only give the patient the ability to call for help but can even detect falls and send an automatic alert to caregivers and medical teams. These and other digital sensors and tools in the home can help caregivers monitor their loved one's health and safety and identify early warning signs before an emergency occurs.

All of these connected health technologies can make the logistics and worry of caring for an aging parent or relative more manageable, but there is a need for tools to help the caregiver manage stress and maintain their own wellness for a healthy longevity. The REACH program (Resources Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health) has been proven to reduce caregiver stress and improve their physical health through education, health reminders and emotional support delivered by phone or live counseling sessions but there is no comparable digital platform to deliver similar modules and support aimed specifically at caregiver health.²

As we progress into the transition where the number of caregivers relative to people over 80 decreases, unpaid family caregiver duties will become more important, more demanding, and will place increased burden on the working generation. The growth of the need for caregiver support is not just a US but a global issue. Digital and connected health technologies have the potential to help ease this burden by improving communication, coordination and helping support caregivers in their critical role.

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