

New Hope for Residents at Risk of Wandering

According to the authors of *Dementia and Wandering Behavior*, the majority of older adults who are ambulatory wander at some time, whether they live at home or in a residential care home. They wander because they are disoriented, restless, agitated or anxious; because they are looking for something like the bathroom, something to eat or a familiar person or place; or because they think that they need to fulfill former obligations such as work or child care.

Remediation for wandering has taken a variety of directions in the past decade from changes to the environment that include disguising doorways and installing bells and buzzers on exits, to playing soothing music and using softer lighting. Others have tried increasing staffing or making staffing changes to ensure that individuals presumed to be at risk are not left without supervision. Still others have made efforts to calm and reduce the anxiety of dementia-afflicted individuals by attempting to seek out the causes of the behaviours to better understand the disorientation and confusion.

At the end of the day, without providing such solutions as around-the-clock, one-on-one supervision, a locked environment, pressure pads on chairs and beds, and buzzers on all entrances, wandering both within and outside the long term care home will still occur. And, administrators will still be faced with the dilemma of how to better safeguard their home by limiting the excursions as well as implementing tools or strategies to locate residents when they do wander.

In the United States, organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association have created the Safe Return program, which registers individuals with vascular dementia or Alzheimer's and seeks to return them to familiar settings as soon as possible. Safe Return maintains a database of identifying information about individuals-at-risk, supplies them with identifying bracelets or jewelry, and runs a national toll-free number to contact when someone is lost or found. The Alzheimer Society in Canada has created a similar service called Safely Home.

by
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In Ontario, a project is also under way by the Ministry of Community and Social Services to test the effectiveness of new technologies in protecting vulnerable people who are at risk of wandering. It aims to understand how locating technology can be used to improve safety while giving families and caregivers the chance to test the usefulness of new technologies with an end goal of determining which technologies are most effective in a variety of different settings. The government has requested expressions of interest from technology companies and plans to run up to four pilot locations for a year, starting later in 2005.

In the meantime, equipping a long term care home with tools to limit wandering means picking from several different approaches. One approach is to provide residents with small transmitters to track their movements within and outside the home. Apart from the previously mentioned Safe Return or Safely Home programs, a number of companies provide watches, jewelry or other devices that can be worn or attached to clothing. These can be tracked over a distance of up to eight kilometres in rural settings and five kilometres in urban settings depending on geography, topology and man-made structures.

These devices differ from locators that use a GPS (Global Positioning System). GPS units must have a clear view to the satellites in order to function correctly. This limits their effectiveness, particularly in areas of dense bush or within buildings where the unit cannot triangulate to the satellites.

A resource that is just becoming available in Canada is Project Lifesaver (Canada), the local arm of a not-for-profit corporation in the United States which provides at-risk individuals with a personalized wristband that emits a tracking signal. If they become lost, a search and rescue team is dispatched to track the signal over several kilometres and return the wanderer to familiar surroundings as soon as possible. This US organization has conducted over 1,000 successful searches and has been endorsed by the National Sheriff's Association and the Alzheimer's Foundation of America.

Another potential tool for administrators could be a series of aerial photographs of the local area around the home taken at different times of the year. If a resident

WANDERING RESOURCES

Companies/ Organizations	Type	Tradenames	Wireless Paging Systems	Proximity Alarms	Clothing Alarms/ Pendants	Door Monitors	Fall Monitors	Bed Pad Monitors	Chair Pad Monitors	PC Software To Log Wander Events
Aatel Communications	Installer & Distributor	EXI RoamAlert, InstanTel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Austco	Manufacturer	CallGuard, MediCall, LightCom, DCS-2000, EasyTouch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bed-Check Corporation	Manufacturer		✓							
Crest Healthcare Canada	Distributor & Manufacturer				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Edwards	Manufacturer	Starcare	✓		✓					
HomeFree Inc.	Manufacturer	Personal Watcher	✓	✓	✓					✓
Locator Systems	Manufacturer	Wanderless System	✓	✓	✓					
Lorin Medical Group	Manufacturer		✓				✓	✓	✓	
Personal Safety Corporation	Manufacturer	Alert-Mate, Alert-Mate II					✓	✓	✓	
RF Technologies	Manufacturer	Code Alert	✓							✓
Smart Caregiver Corporation	Manufacturer		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tunstall Canada	Installer & Distributor	Code Alert	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Verichip Corporation	Manufacturer	InstanTel, RoamAlert	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Wireless RNA Technology	Installer & Distributor	CallGuard, MediCall, LightCom, DCS-2000, Easy Touch, Xmark, Verichip Corp.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Xmark	Manufacturer	InstanTel	✓	✓	✓	✓				

Please be aware that all wireless products may require FCC approval.

ADDITIONAL WANDERING RESOURCES

Companies/ Organizations	Tradenames	Seasonal Aerial Facility Photos	Database of At-Risk Individuals	Search and Rescue Teams
AFS Aerial Photography	Aerial Search & Rescue Package	✓		
Alzheimer Society	Safely Home		✓	
Project Lifesaver (Canada)	Project Lifesaver			✓



becomes lost, searchers can use the seasonal images to help identify possible locations for concentrated search efforts.

Within the home, passive-monitoring devices can be installed in strategic locations in the resident's room to monitor resident movement. This approach can use any combination of movement monitors in resident beds, in carpet pads beside beds, on chairs and in the doorways to rooms, as well as additional monitors at the exits to the home.

The balancing act that most system installers and administrators have to address is how many monitors of all types should be installed in order to be effective, without creating situations where the staff can become overwhelmed by the number of signals. Large homes with many monitoring devices and large resident populations could find this a challenging task.

Most companies offering electronic wander prevention systems share some of the same characteristics. They frequently use radio frequencies or infrared systems as a conduit to tie together various types of alarms. Many of these systems are built as adjuncts or add-ons to other systems designed for the long term care setting (for example, nurse-call systems). As previously mentioned, some of the alarms are built into jewelry or pendants that are worn by residents. Others consist of mats in front of beds or chairs, or are attached to furniture or door locks to monitor activity or use.

The chart on this page identifies some of the companies that readers may wish to contact for further information about their products. Please note that the list includes both manufacturers and distributors. LTC

Contact Information

Aatel Communications
413 Victoria Avenue
Hamilton, ON L8L 8G4
905-523-5451
www.aatel.com

AFS Aerial Photography
2100 Crumlin SideRoad
London, ON N5V 3Z9
519-453-8999
www.aerialphotography.ca

Alzheimer Society of Canada
National Office
20 Eglinton Ave. W., Suite 1200
Toronto, ON M4R 1K8
416-488-8772; 1 800 616-8816
www.alzheimer.ca

Austco Marketing & Service (Canada) Ltd.
60 Granton Dr., Unit 6
Richmond Hill, ON L4B 2N6
905-731-1830
www.austco.ca

Bed-Check Corporation
P.O. Box 170, 307 E., Brady Street
Tulsa, OK 74120
918-592-3338; 1 800 523-7956
www.bedcheck.com

Crest Healthcare Canada
413 Victoria Ave.
Hamilton, ON L8L 8G4
905-523-5451
www.cresthealthcare.ca

Edwards, Part of GE Infrastructure
Security
625 6th Street East
Owen Sound, ON N4K 5P8
519-376-2430
www.edwards.ca

HomeFree Systems Inc.
6629 West Mill Road
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53218
414-358-8200
www.homefreesys.com

Locator Systems Corporation
692 Sumas Street
Victoria, BC V8T 4S6
1 866 863-5155
www.locatorsystemscorp.com

Lorin Medical Group
Box 360
Newmarket, ON L3Y 4X7
1 800 820-9326
www.lorinmed.com

Personal Safety Corporation
P.O. Box R28
Hiawatha, Iowa 52233
1 800 373-3307
www.psc.nu

Project Lifesaver (Canada) Inc.
519-894-6435
www.projectlifesavercanada.org

RF Technologies
3125 North 126th Street
Brookfield, WI, USA 53005
262-790-1771; www.rft.com

Smart Caregiver Corporation
1205 North McDowell Boulevard
Petaluma, California 94954
707-781-7450
www.smartcaregivercorp.com

Tunstall Canada Inc.
7540 Bath Road
Mississauga, ON L4T 1L2
905-677-1144
www.tunstallcanada.com

VeriChip Corporate Office
1690 South Congress Ave., Suite 200
Delray Beach, Florida 33445
1 800 970-CHIP; 561-805-8008
www.verichipcorp.com

Wireless RNA Technologies
21 Antares Drive, Unit 120
Ottawa, ON K2E 7T8
613-727-8340
www.wirelessrna.com

Xmark
309 Legget Drive
Kanata, ON K2K 3A3
1 800 267-9111
www.verichipcorp.com

For Further Reading

- Silverstein, N.M., Flaherty, G. and Salmons, Tobin T. (2002). *Dementia and Wandering Behavior: Concern for the Lost Elder*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.
- Algate, D.L. (1999). Wandering: A dementia-compromised behavior. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 25(9), 10-17.
- www.mcss.gov.on.ca/CFCS/en/newsRoom/newsReleases/050630.htm.

Cautionary note: Wireless devices operating at low power levels on radio frequencies are subject to regulation by Industry Canada as well as the FCC in the United States.



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