



Connect, Care & Contain

Retirement villages and the role of
technology in the age of Covid-19

Introduction

Seniors are at greater risk from Covid-19 than anyone else. As a result, retirement village operators around the world are taking unprecedented steps to protect their residents against the virus and mitigate the impact on their businesses.

Retirement villages in New Zealand face a huge challenge, one that's likely to continue well beyond current restrictions. As the industry comes to terms with this, it's timely to discuss what operators can do to fulfil their duty of care and remain viable in the age of Covid-19.

Essential technology remains absent from retirement villages

As soon as Covid-19 took hold, it was clear that Industries, businesses and households were unprepared. The healthcare industry lacked personnel, equipment and beds, businesses were short on Zoom conferencing and households were, among other things, low on toilet paper.

Because the world had not experienced a crisis like this, retirement village operators were unprepared. They had infectious disease protocols and emergency "1-pagers" to send out, but they did not have the technology in place to effectively manage a 4-week lockdown at the village.



Specifically, they lacked a system for mass communication, they couldn't remotely monitor the health of their residents and they were unable to provide a virtual telehealth service. These three things (at a minimum) are now a priority for every retirement village operator in NZ.

Coronavirus poses a significant threat to retirement villages. Adding the right technology can help operators reduce contagion among residents, staff and outsiders. Adding the right technology can also help villages regain their footing and become more competitive when society eventually overcomes this pandemic.

Industry leaders will set a new standard

Age friendly technology will be the next battleground for competitive advantage in the retirement village industry. The Covid-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on how villages manage self-isolation, and this presents operators with both risks and opportunities.

Dutiful operators want technology in place to help manage an outbreak as soon as possible.

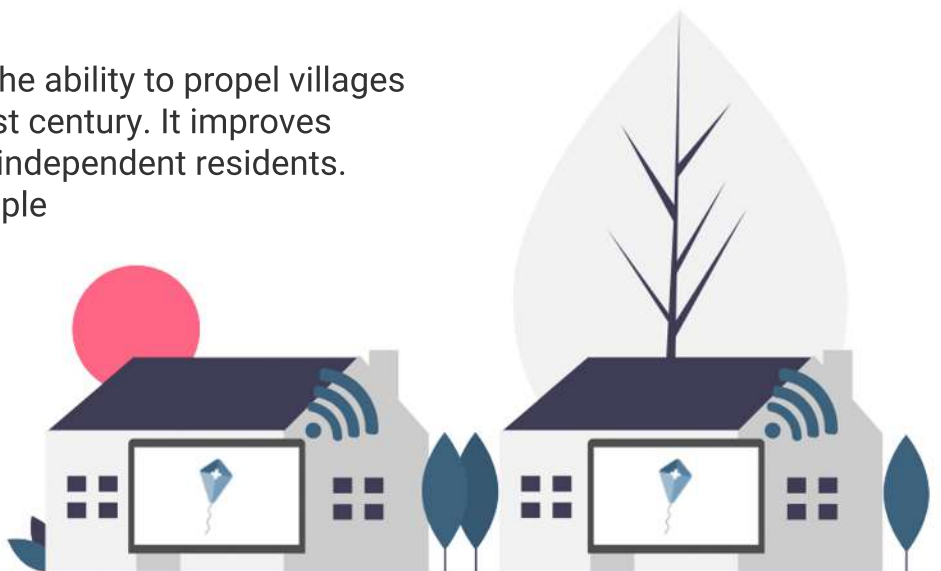
There are two reasons for this:

1. Ensure the safety of existing residents and staff members
2. Reassure people who are nervous about moving into a retirement village now and in the future

There is a third reason. Some operators want to be leaders in the industry with regard to technology. Equipping every house and apartment with age friendly technology in the form of a clever touch screen tablet, sets a new standard and will give them an edge over the competition.

Age friendly technology has the ability to propel villages (even older ones) into the 21st century. It improves communication and care for independent residents. In an emergency it keeps people safe and well informed.

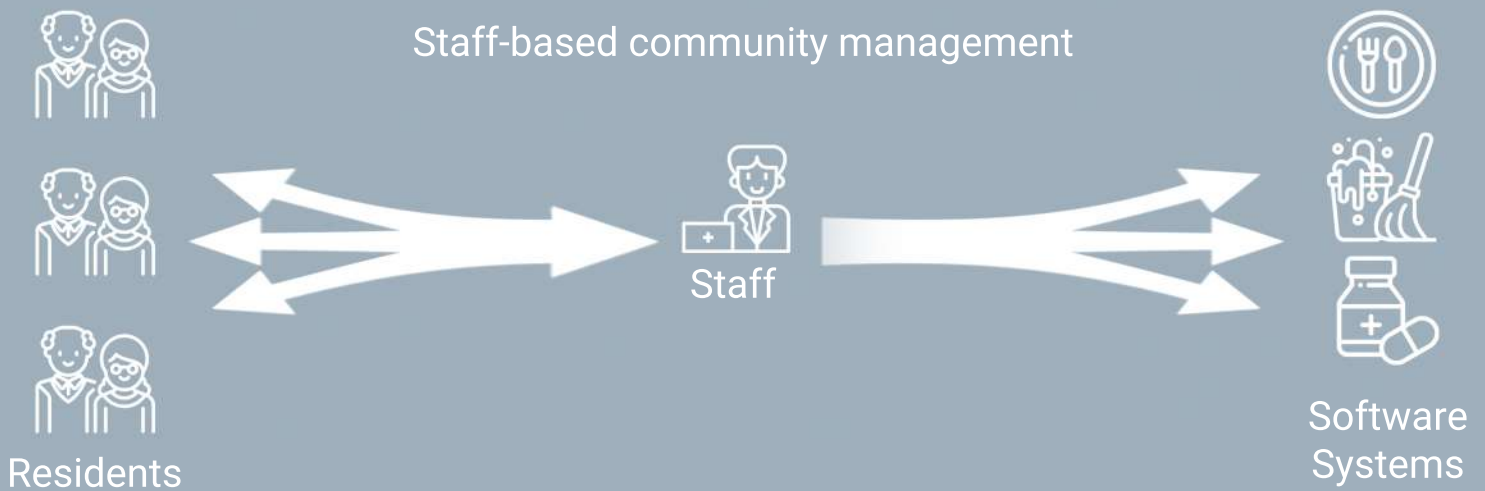
Technology enabled residents are more independent and as a result, the village is more efficient.



Age friendly technology is a revolution of independence

Age-friendly technology is a touch-screen tablet that goes in every house and apartment. It's a revolution of independence for seniors and it makes management of the village community easier for everyone, including the staff.

Most retirement villages need a lot of staff to manage their community. Staff members spend many days every month using a myriad of systems to handle everything from activity requests to maintenance requests, book everything from seats on the bus to seats in the cinema, place orders from food to housekeeping and reserve everything from restaurant tables to library books.

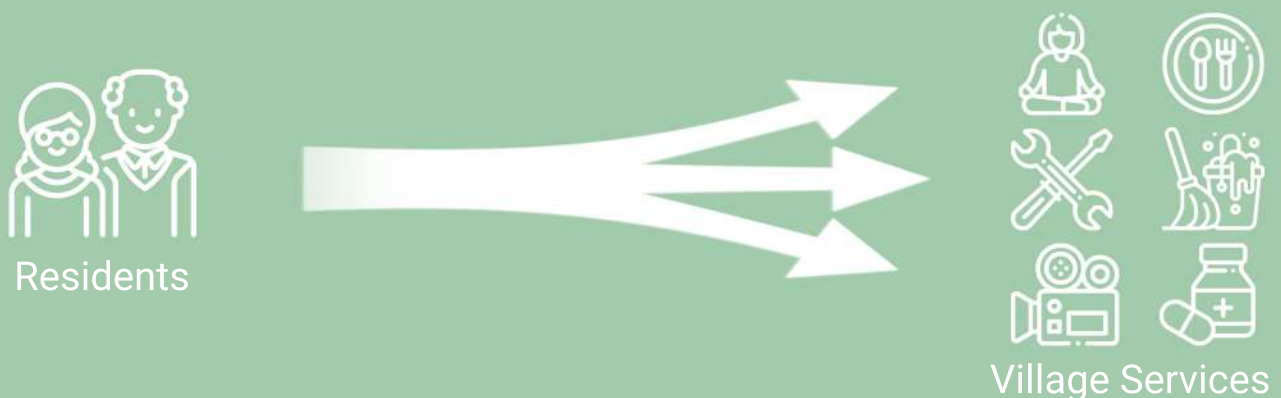


Receptionists end up becoming concierges, and while that sounds glamorous it's hopelessly inefficient. Going from one system to the next, entering data, relating back to residents, talking to staff and making changes takes a long time every month. Inevitably there are errors and this has a negative impact on residents and staff members.

Age friendly technology gives residents the power to manage all this themselves. With Spritely, seniors have a lot more freedom and control and the staff have a lot more time. Residents love it because they cherish independence and they don't want to rely on others.

Among many other things, Spritely allows residents to book and plan activities, schedule maintenance call outs and make dinner reservations, all via a touch screen tablet in their home. Administration is kept to a minimum, village assistants are seldom involved, and everything is connected through a single portal saving villages time and money

Resident-directed community management



Villages can provide extra care for residents without adding staff

Adding age-friendly technology to all houses and apartments means that every resident has access to telehealth. They can video call a Telenurse or Telepharmacist and have a face-to-face consultation without leaving their house.

For many residents who want to avoid GP waiting rooms, video consultations are perfect. Residents can confidently avoid unnecessary trips to the GP, unless the Telehealth specialist thinks they should go in person. In the current environment this sort of triaging is extremely valuable. With age friendly technology, retirement villages and their residents can help to reduce pressure on NZ GPs.

An effective Telehealth service requires more than just visual contact though. For a Telenurse to triage people, they need to see common vital signs like blood pressure, heart rate and temperature. For some people blood glucose and blood oxygen measurements are also helpful. If someone is being screened for Covid-19 or presenting with more acute symptoms, then temperature becomes very important.



Spritely makes it possible to do this remotely. Seniors can take their own readings with a single tap, using wireless devices that connect to their touch screen. The readings are instantly visible to the Telenurse or Telepharmacist and can be easily shared with the resident's GP.

Spritely can generate a full 90-day medical history for every resident, including their health vitals and any symptoms they might have observed. Residents can communicate any symptoms via Spritely's symptom tracker on the touch screen tablet at any time.

Nothing is more important to residents and prospective residents than their health. Installing Spritely in every house allows operators to reaffirm their commitment to care, even in independent houses where the latest healthcare technology is prominently displayed.

Communication is key

Technology is essential in order to frequently communicate with a large number of people simultaneously. Schools have an app that parents can download, airports use large screens and a public address system, cabin crew make use of the in-flight entertainment system and corporates use "all-company" emails.

For the most part, retirement villages lack the technology they need to efficiently communicate with all their independent residents.

Most villages still rely on paper flyers put in letterboxes. This is because emailing, texting, and using smartphone apps or websites doesn't consistently reach enough residents. The problem is that paper flyers are extremely cumbersome; it takes hours to prepare and approve each flyer, it costs money to print them and time to cut them up and post them, which inevitably leads to a lack of communication.

A lack of communication, particularly during a crisis, often makes things worse. In a crisis, paper flyers are not even fit for purpose. Things change quickly. By the time one flyer has been created and delivered to 200+ letter boxes, it's out of date.

Compare this to an age-friendly technology system that allows digital notices (including videos) to be sent to everyone in just a few minutes. The system can also be used to instantly communicate with specific groups of residents or individuals, for example people who aren't feeling well.

When you have age friendly technology in every house, it is possible to conduct wellness surveys to check in on people. A village manager can quickly and easily find out how everyone in the village is feeling by sending a survey asking them to rate how they feel and add comments about their current situation.

People who rate themselves poorly can be followed up with a personal video call in order to visually assess their welfare.

In the event of an emergency, age friendly technology can also be used to communicate urgent messages including sound effects such as a siren. Civil Defence agencies do this to get important messages out in the event of a natural disaster, such as the Christchurch earthquake in 2011.

Age friendly technology can also be used to determine if people are alright in an emergency. Urgent messages can be made interactive, giving people the opportunity to confirm they're ok. People who have not responded get prioritised during the emergency response.

Case study – Qestral Corporation

Age friendly technology has a very important role to play in NZ retirement villages. Both residents and staff benefit when an operator installs touch screens in every house. These benefits have been made particularly obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Qestral Corporation, owner of multiple retirement villages in New Zealand, provides an excellent example of this. The company installed Spritely tablets in every house and apartment in 2019, long before anyone had heard of COVID-19. They did this to help residents stay independent in their houses for longer.

Every retirement village should have a centrally controlled digital noticeboard in every house, if only for communication purposes.

*- John Ryder
Cofounder, Ryman Healthcare*

There were also significant cost savings from installing Spritely. Qestral management estimate that Spritely saves them around \$100k per village, per year in staffing costs.

In March 2020, another significant benefit became evident. When everyone was forced into self-isolation, Spritely became an essential method for 24/7 communication. And in a New Zealand first, Qestral Corporation was able to turn their care centre into a hub for telehealth and remote medical monitoring and make it available to every single resident in every village.

During lockdown there was a surge in usage with Qestral observing:

- ◆ A 200% increase in daily active users
- ◆ A 150% increase in session times
- ◆ A 10 fold increase in noticeboard messages
- ◆ A 400% increase in video calling
- ◆ A 500% increase in the number of health vital recordings

This dramatic increase in usage also fueled a wave of appreciative feedback from residents. This clearly illustrated the positive impact Spritely's technology had during an otherwise difficult and anxious time.

Qestral residents were particularly appreciative of these features:

- ◆ Broadcast communication for important announcements
- ◆ Regular wellness surveys to check resident health
- ◆ Frequent temperature readings to identify fever
- ◆ Virtual consultations with care centre staff
- ◆ Video calling between houses
- ◆ Daily video activities and exercises
- ◆ Popular puzzles and games
- ◆ Medication delivery

We got in touch with a few people at Alpine View retirement village, which is operated by Qestral, and asked them about Spritely.

Salesperson



"The tablet is eye-catching. Open home visitors pick it up straight away and we have a hard time getting them to put it down."

- *Jeremy*

Resident



"We're daily users. I play the games every day, check the noticeboard and the weather. My husband takes his blood pressure. The medication service is extremely good."

- *Helen*

Operator



"Spritely has made a hugely positive difference to our operation. Staff members and residents are highly appreciative, as are we."

- *Simon*

Staff



"We can never go back to printing flyers or booking activities. There would be a mutiny."

- *Kelly*

Contact us

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