

## **Senior Care Corner Podcast Transcript: Technology To Help Seniors Stay Safe & Healthy at Home**

**Barry:** Welcome to Senior Care Corner. I'm Barry

**Kathy:** and I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us.

**Barry:** You'll find us online at seniorcarecorner.com with solutions and information for families and others who care for and about senior adults. Well Kathy, today I think we've got a great episode for everyone. We've got a special guest stopping by for a chat about some technology that's improving the safety and well-being of senior loved ones, something that's really near and dear to Senior Care Corner; and you've got some news items for us and as always we've got a quick tip. So how about sharing the news Kathy?

**Kathy:** Ok, this first news item is something that we all need to be aware of and talk to our seniors about; police warn: beware of the grandparents scam. The area agency on aging and law enforcement agencies are urging everyone to spread the word about a scam that has returned. A grandmother in Iowa recently received a phone call from someone claiming to be her grandson. He said that he was in trouble with the law and needed her to send money for his bond. She wired him the money according to the instructions. Of course, she lost her money because it was a hoax.

Signs of a grandparent's scam that we all need to know about: you'll receive an urgent call about some emergency that requires cash to be sent over Western Union or by money gram; this is usually combined with some form of secrecy such as "don't tell my parents". Seniors are getting more and more of these scam calls lately according to police and many seniors are becoming victims. Con artists are tricking seniors into giving them names and information; remember don't give out information, don't wire any money. We all need to remind our seniors to be cautious.

**Barry:** I say that's a good reminder for us and for our loved ones.

**Kathy:** That's right. Alright, our second news item today; more people using the free preventative benefits provided by the Affordable Care Act. We hope you're taking advantage as well. The centers for Medicare and Medicaid services reported that almost 20.5 million Medicare Beneficiaries received an annual wellness visit or other preventative service this year.

This preventative service has no deductible or cost sharing to our seniors. They reported that 1.8 million seniors have received discounts on their medications and the Medicare Part D Gap or Donut Hole, from the period from January to August this year. The average senior has had savings of \$530. The Affordable Care Act has allowed some seniors to receive preventative healthcare for free. As open enrollment begins now, you may want to help your senior choose the best plan to meet their needs. You can learn all about local drug and health plan options available by going to Medicare Plan Finder; we'll have a link to this website in our show notes so you can check it out for yourself later.

Alright, in our next news item also concerns our seniors and their finances. 96% of low income, 50 plus year old homeowners have been burdened by housing costs. The cost of housing is

becoming much more difficult to manage for our seniors. It's hardest for renters and those who continue to have a mortgage as they age.

Between the year 2000 and 2009, there's been an increase in the cost of housing for our seniors. 96% homeowners age 50 plus with a mortgage have incomes under \$23,000. 48% of them spend at least 30% of their total income just on housing. The number of seniors who own their own homes outright dropped from 38% in 2009. For those 65 and older, 54% of them own their own home, but 26% are still having a mortgage to pay. Rising property taxes, utilities, and maintenance cost might mean that some seniors will not be able to age in place as they had originally planned.

**Barry:** I guess it is a big change from past years; and I guess this is the time maybe when our grandparents were growing up when everyone had a mortgage burning party well before they retired; so they own their own home outright and didn't have to worry about a mortgage.

**Kathy:** Right. Alight, our final news item today is about our health. Time to get vaccinated! This year there are new options besides the seasonal flu shot; people over 65 can get a high dose version which could offer greater protection against the flu. There is also a nasal spray flu vaccine available this year, but it is not recommended for seniors, so be sure to talk to your senior about that.

Don't forget a pneumonia vaccine if you haven't had one yet! To learn more about vaccines we need and to find a flu shot near you, we'll link you with flu.gov on our show notes so you can learn more.

**Barry:** Well very valuable news items today Kathy.

**Kathy:** Thank you.

**Barry:** Well now we want to jump right into our feature segment for this episode. We want to let you know that it was recorded a few days ago, so if it sounds a little different, that's why. But here we go.

### **Recording:**

**Barry:** Regular visitors to Senior Care Corner know we are all about enabling families to help their senior loved ones, especially if those loved ones want to live on their own in their own homes. You also know that we focus often on technology that either directly improve the quality of senior's lives or help connect them with the world outside their homes. Today we bring you a discussion of a technology that does both.

Joining us today is Laura Mitchell, who is Vice President of Marketing for Grand Care Systems. Grand Care offers a technology that attracted our interest the first time we encountered it and we want to learn more right along with you. Welcome Laura. And thank you for joining us today.

**Laura:** Thank you for having me.

**Barry:** Well Vice President of Marketing, we know that that's a very important role in the company and we appreciate the time that you are spending with us here because we know that you have many other things to do. We'd like to talk to about Grand Care Systems; but one thing

that got our attention right away, as with so many other people who get involved with businesses related to senior care, there is a personal story that drove their involvement. And we understand there's a personal story behind the founding of Grand Care Systems, could you relate that to us?

**Laura:** Absolutely, yes. Our founder, Charlie, had also referred to Plato's "necessity as the mother of invention"; and I think that couldn't be more true for Grand Care Systems. He um...Charlie actually came up with the idea back in the early 90's when he was caring for his great grandmother. It was actually his great aunt; she raised his father; so it was like his grandmother. And she was living on the same property as he and his wife were back in the 90's. And um... they saw her probably once or twice a day; everyday. She came over for breakfast and dinner at their house. And she lived in a little cottage; they didn't really go over to her house very often. But she would go over and see them and they would you know. She was doing quite well, very mentally acute. She would walk over every day; so she was getting some exercise. And she was doing really really well. And you know of course, they were feeding her and making sure that she herself was doing quite fine.

Well, one day in January, she called him, Charlie, and said "I'm really cold in my house". He said "ok, I'll be right over". It was Wisconsin in January, you know, it gets pretty cold. So he headed over there; and it was cold because all her windows were open in her cottage. And all her windows were open because there was literally smoke in her house and it smelled. And um... he went down to the little crawl space underneath her cottage. And noticed that the furnace was literally on fire; so he crawls past the....you know he had to turn off the propane; he had to actually crawl past it. He said that it was a pretty frightening experience.

And come to find out later, upon asking what had caused it. Well it turns out that she'd endured these huge leaps of huge temperature swings; it'd go cold to hot; she'd be opening up the windows. She'd been hearing these crazy noises coming from the basement, the crawl space. She'd also had long noticed the smoke detector had gone off and run itself out of batteries and she never knew it.

**Barry:** Oh my goodness.

**Laura:** And he's thinking, "Why? Why did you not tell us? We see you twice a day, every single day." "Oh Charlie, you're so busy. I didn't want to bother you. You already do so much for me, I didn't want to be a burden and make you have to deal with it. And da da da da."

And he just sat there and thought, "Wow, my grandmother who lives pretty much on our property almost went up in flames with her house. And we see her so often and this could have happened and right under our noses." And he started thinking gosh well I couldn't believe it.

Charlie is an engineer by trade. He graduated from MIT so he's a smart guy. He started thinking; "Wow there's got to be something out there. You know we see her every day, so we know she's fine; but there has to be a system that would actually be able to monitor her surroundings; her home." Monitor what she's doing, which would tell us a great deal about that person.

Well, he looked out there and he couldn't find anything. So he applied for a government grant back in the 90's. And for the system, what became the Grand Care System; and he always likes

to joke, pride in his work given for predicting rain and not for building arks; because it was turned down at the time. And they actually thought that it just really wasn't possible.

This was before the internet was user friendly; by any extent, so he would have had to put together a series of modems to talk to each other and make the phone calls. It would have been a pretty difficult thing to do, even when we did start the company officially in 2005; it was pretty difficult and we were pretty early to the market. It was pretty bleeding edge at the time, and hard to get the vision accepted even at that time. So it would have been really difficult in the early 90's to do that.

So, he decided to table it for a while and came back to it in 2005. And it started really pretty simple with just some motion detectors and a couple of different sensors that could tell things around the house. And we'd always, one thing that's always been critical about the Grand Care System that really separated it from the others; which I feel is one of Charlie's most innovative visions is the fact that he thought that it was so important that we add a communication piece to the system.

So back in 2005, the communications piece was simply the fact that you could send pictures, messages, emails, reminders, calendar appointments and things to a dedicated channel on their TV; so it was really like a private hotel channel. Well, since then the system, we've added a lot more sensors in the system; we added a lot more like tele-health centers, Bluetooth enabled tele-health centers and devices; stove/appliance sensors that can turn off the stove if it's been left on too long; things like that.

We've also added an interactive touch component to the system. Where not only now can the loved one receive communications from the family but they can interact with it. They can send back communications; they can play games like tic-tac-toe and solitaire on there. They can also watch YouTube videos right on the touch screen that the caregiver has set in there. They don't have to know anything about technology to benefit from it. They can also, like we're doing now, they can also Skype using the system, without even having to know what Skype is!

**Barry:** Say from such simple beginnings and such a straightforward story, straightforward need, comes a very, I wouldn't say complex system, but a very through system. So many components to it, it does so much; that's really what caught our attention. That it can do so much and it is so simple for the senior to use.

**Laura:** Right, well thank you. It's kind of the design was that the senior, or the loved one, doesn't have to know anything or learn anything new in order to benefit from the system. So if the loved one does not want to do anything at all, they don't need to. The system is entirely passive. The sensors are strategically placed around the house. We have everything from motion, and temperature, and door, and bed, and chair, and caller id sensors that can flash the picture up on the screen of the person calling; along with a description of who's calling so that the loved one can take a look at the screen and say ok, it's my neighbor calling.

Everything from cognitive assistance to sensors, things that can remind them when to take medications or what they need to do with their medications; there's assessments that can be filled out so they can explain how they're feeling that can be sent to either the family professionals or professional care providers.

**Kathy:** Laura, I have a question. I also, when we viewed this, was very easy to use. I have a question with regards to all the different components; is it all in one? Or is it something that you can pick what's most pertinent to your situation?

**Laura:** Oh you can absolutely customize the system to exactly fit your needs. So some of our customers just have the non-interactive system, the standard classic model that we first came up with in 2005; where there's no touch screen involved. It's simply a black box that goes into the home of the loved one and then various sensors that they can decide which ones they need. So if you're only looking to detect, you know, if a loved one gets out of bed and doesn't return during the night; you might choose the bed sensor. And if you'd like to monitor the in home temperature, like Charlie would like to have done with his grandmother, maybe you just choose the temperature sensor and maybe a couple of door sensors. So you can really select and pick and choose. If someone had, you know, congestive heart failure and you needed to monitor their blood pressure and weight, they might choose the Bluetooth enabled blood pressure device and weight scale that can automatically track that to the system and can automatically record and track that. And the caregivers or the healthcare professionals can access that information with their user password online.

**Kathy:** They can just customize it.

**Barry:** How did you get to all these different applications for it? Is it something that you developed these internally or is it somewhat based on what people have come to you requesting?

**Laura:** Um, a little bit of both. So Grand Care Systems, our value is the software. So we just write the software we don't manufacture any of the computer systems or the sensors. All of the sensors that we use are standard off the shelf, protocol driven sensors. So like the motion sensors are just typical motion sensors that have been around that you have probably seen before. And the Bluetooth enabled sensors are just like medical enabled sensors that we've got like blood pressure, weight scale, *pulse-ox*, *glucommeter*. We have a medication dispenser that we have integrated with.

So all of it is things that are existing that we've integrated with; as far as the touch screen component, it really has been, it's come out of a need again. When we have just the non-interactive version, we had a lot of the residences at senior centers loved the fact that they could look at, that the family could send them pictures and emails and things to their TV screen. But then we started to get the requests, "Well how do I respond? Well what if I wanted to see that picture again? How do I control it?" So that's where the touch screen came to be. So that they could actually have control and they could look at their pictures on demand. They could watch church services on there. The family members started to add YouTube videos of the grandchildren walking and ballet recitals that they couldn't go to. And things like that; and then they started adding really personalized. They started adding like old Dean Martin videos, and Frank Sinatra singing videos that the loved one could watch, those types of things.

**Kathy:** That's great!

**Barry:** Well as a family member, I could see so many people jumping up and down saying "this is terrific, we want this". How is it received by the senior loved ones in whose home it goes?

**Laura:** Well, I think it depends. Um, for the most part, the idea of it can be a little daunting sometimes. But once the loved one gets it into their home, especially if the family is very active in sending the communication, you can't take it away after that; especially when the grandchildren get involved and start sending grandma and grandpa the information or the emails or the pictures or things like that. We have a Facebook feed that the Grand Care System can automatically grab all of the pictures that you've already posted on Facebook and put it on mom or dad's system. So it's really nice, you don't have to add them again and mom and dad really get to experience the value of all that social media that we benefit from every day.

**Barry:** Well that's great. I can see that could almost be a sense, get then to really see the need from their standpoint, the communication and for the other features and for them everything else comes along for the ride.

**Laura:** Absolutely. That's part of what Charlie's vision was in the beginning; there's got to be a value add for the loved one. You know, if you get a system and all it does is monitor a bunch of stuff, you just sit and wait for something to happen and nothing happens. Whereas with the Grand Care System, as soon as it's installed immediately you're opened to a brand new world of virtual communication. And of course with the web chatting, the video chat via Skype, on the Grand Care System, there's a built in webcam to the touch screen; and that enables them to participate in the virtual web visits too. So that kind of adds a little bit of fun and it can be nice so that the caregiver, remote caregiver, can actually see the loved one.

**Barry:** Well I can see that being features taking it from being, what might be an intrusion in their lives to a welcome guest in their home.

**Laura:** Absolutely, especially since it's only with who they authorize to be able to take a look at that information; so it'd be family members and all designated caregivers.

**Barry:** How many systems are in place now?

**Laura:** We are in the thousands, so we not quite yet in the big time with hundreds of thousands, or anything like that. But for the market, we're pretty much on par with how everybody in this industry is doing. We're all really just still trying; we spent a couple of years from 2005 until probably about 2010 or 2009, really just trying to sell the value of technology in the aging industry. And just in the last year has it really gotten to the point where people are like "OK, you know, let's do this now" and so a lot of the long term care providers are coming up to them and saying "this is what we want to do"; a lot of the home care providers are really starting to see the value in offering this to their clients in complement to their care. So now it's really being viewed as a care giving tool.

**Barry:** Well this is something; I think one of the many things that technology offers that if you don't know about it you don't realize you need it; but once you know, it's so cool.

**Laura:** Yea absolutely, I think one of our distributors, Ken Kerr (?) from Home Controls; I just have to give him credit for this because he always, he would make the analogy of the remote control. You don't know you need it until you have it, and then you'd never give it up.

**Barry:** Yup.

**Laura:** People spend hours trying to find hours trying to find the remote control before getting up and change the channel.

**Kathy:** Right.

**Laura:** If it were the remote garage door opener would be the thing today.

**Kathy:** Laura does the home need to have a computer, or internet access, or is it just through the telephone; how does it get set up?

**Laura:** They would need to have some sort of internet access to use the system. The system itself IS a computer, so they do not need their own computer or anything else. So the system itself gets placed, and then the caregivers; are actually when they log into our website from anywhere around the world. The caregivers actually just need an internet connection. The caregivers log into our website and they can access all of the information and they can send the communications thru our website. But the loved one just needs an internet connection and then the system itself.

**Kathy:** Ok. And all the sensors are wireless?

**Laura:** All the sensors are wireless, yup. So no wiring or anything crazy, installation-wise, is necessary.

**Barry:** So it sounds like technology came in at just the right time to make it happen right. Wire, especially in a lot of the older homes, would probably be a real mess.

**Laura:** Yes, yes, I think wireless is definitely; and it's neater and easier to move because you know at that stage of live its possibility that it may be needed at some point. They can take the system with them wherever they go.

**Barry:** So are there any stories, like Charlie's that have been; I don't know things that have been prevented by the system?

**Laura:** Well, you know we've heard a lot of different stories from some of our clients, and we've gotten some great testimonials. A lot of it, what I hear, is just hearsay from our dealers and from our clients of what has happened. I heard a story from a Kansas dealer that one of his clients couldn't move out of her bed and she pressed one of our Contact Me buttons that was placed on her bed. Someone was able to her to help her.

So that's always nice to hear, success stories like that. We did hear a story from one of our New Jersey clients who was able to, she had in-home care, and she was paying just a ridiculous amount for in-home care that some of it she did not need. And she was able to reduce, in her estimation; she was able to reduce from 24 hour care to 8 hour care. Which is pretty significant as far as the cost saving; and it really wasn't about the cost saving for her. She really just wanted a little bit more freedom and the ability to have the system just notify someone if something was wrong instead of having someone following her around all day. She was happy to get a little bit more independence.

**Barry:** I'll say it gave her her life back; it sounds like.

**Laura:** Yea. I think a little bit. I think, I think, you know in as much as with the system, we don't really claim to replace in-home care of anything like that because the system is really a caregiving tool. It enhances the caregiving that someone is providing. But it certainly can be used like that. I've got one woman in Louisiana who uses the system; her mother lives with her but she works all day. She uses the system to monitor her mom while she's working. And it's really just to make sure that her mom doesn't leave the house or that somebody else doesn't come into the house; and other things that you know, that...she accesses the medication when she's supposed to; she accesses the fridge during lunch time because she makes lunches for her and she puts them in the fridge and she wants to make sure that mom actually going into the fridge to access them.

So certain things like that. It's really pretty simple stuff. None of it is rocket science. The way that we put it together is really in a holistic approach just to take in what people need and put it together into a comprehensive system.

**Kathy:** And that's the only child in a long distance caregiver situation; this would provide them with a great piece of mind because they can check up on them at every level and every aspect throughout their day.

**Laura:** Absolutely! And you know we've said that the notion that you don't need to feel guilty about being long distance, now you can share the care. Is what we say, especially you hire an in-home provider and you live some distance away, you can still be involved and still make really rational and educated decisions on someone's care because you know a little bit more about what's going on.

**Barry:** Well that sounds great. This is really a great system. I can understand why it's growing in popularity right now. It doesn't sound like something that somebody could go to the Big Box store and get off the shelf though, how would somebody get the Grand Care System?

**Laura:** Well, they could come right to our website, [www.grandcare.com](http://www.grandcare.com). And we can hook them up with an authorized installer who can install the system for them and also go through the assessment and make sure they get exactly the customized grand care solution, you know, for them.

**Barry:** That does sound like it would be important because there are so many aspects to it. You want to make sure that you get what you need but also make sure that you're using what's there.

**Laura:** Right and you know they can start very small and build on as they need it. So they don't have to purchase everything at once, they can, you know, along the way if they happen to need a different sensor, they can add that it at any time.

**Barry:** Well that's a great aspect to it; the system can grow as needs grow.

**Laura:** Absolutely.

**Barry:** Well, I guess we'd like to thank you for spending time with us here. We've really enjoyed it. I guess where should we send people who are interested in getting more information, the website?



**Laura:** Sure, great. Right, come onto our website, [www.grandcare.com](http://www.grandcare.com). We're on Facebook, Twitter, and Linked In. We've got a great blog that we talk all about aging and technology and Grand Care; it's just grandcare.orgpress.com. And then also they can email us at info@grandcare.com. Or they can call us directly and we're happy to get them in touch with one of our sales representatives who can answer all of their questions about Grand Care. They can dial us directly at 262-338-6147.

**Barry:** And we'll go ahead and put links to your website and blog into our show notes here so everybody can see that and they don't have to write it down while they're listening.

**Laura:** Excellent!

**Barry:** Well, thank you very much Laura, we really do appreciate you spending time with us and I'm sure we're going to run into again in the future. We're certainly going to keep track of what you're doing with the Grand Care System.

**Laura:** Oh thank you! We're going to be at a lot of shows in the upcoming next months. We're out at a lot of different places explaining the technology and we've got lots of demo houses all around the country and in Canada. So if anybody is interested in taking a look at the system, they can certainly contact us and we can direct them to the closest place to take a look or there's lots of videos online on YouTube that showcase the system. So, yea, we'd love to meet with anyone.

**Barry:** Thank you very much.

**Kathy:** Thank you Laura.

**Live:**

**Barry:** Well that was a very interesting and informative discussion. We appreciate Laura spending time with us and look forward to talking with her in the future.

**Kathy:** And today Barry has our quick tip! Something we're all very excited about and we hope that you will be too!

**Barry:** Yea, today's quick tip is about a resource that we put together in response to requests and comments we've gotten from many in our community for additional resources and a place to purchase some of the products we mention in our blog posts and podcasts. We have heard you and put together what we're calling the Senior Care Corner Bookstore. Like many bookstores now, it's a whole lot more than books with software, gifts, and electronic items of interest to families and caregivers of senior adults. We have picked out the products but all the transactions are done with Amazon.com and products are shipped by Amazon so you know it's safe and reliable. And you know there's a secure system taking your payment information. That's very important to us and we think it's very important to you.

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Senior Care Corner Bookstore and let us know what you think and suggest any other products or categories you'd like us to cover. And that's our quick tip, Kathy.

**Kathy:** Well thank you Barry.

**Barry:** Once again we hope you'll stop by and visit us at SeniorCareCorner.com. We'll look forward to seeing you again in the next episode. But until then we hope everybody has a great day.