



Reach for the Quality!

The Chronicle

Locally owned, locally committed

© Copyright 2013 The Chronicle, Glens Falls, New York • Published Feb. 21, 2013

Lone Oak Publishing Co., Inc., P.O. Box 153, Glens Falls, NY 12801 • 518.792.1126 • chronicle@loneoak.com

His goal: Keep seniors in *their* homes, not in a home

By David Cederstrom
Chronicle Staff Writer

"The Holy Grail was really how to keep people in their own homes" as seniors, and at a lower cost, said Dr. Allan "Chip" Teel, explaining his "Full Circle America" program to an audience of about 42 people at Crandall Library on Feb. 12.

The talk was sponsored by the group Aging In Place — Glens Falls.

Harvey Noordsy, its president, said some members met with Dr. Teel earlier in the day "to talk seriously about developing a program [like the doctor's] here....We're going to be following through on that."

Aging In Place is already doing many of the things Dr. Teel advocates, said Mr. Noordsy.

Dr. Teel, from Damariscotta, Maine, said his program combines "off-the-shelf technology," like a simple-to-use version of a Skype phone (video telephone) and remotely accessible Webcam video cameras, with a coordinated network of family, friends and in-home support specialists to enable frail senior citizens to continue living at home, at what he said is a fraction of the cost of more traditional programs.

Dr. Teel's plan is sometimes referred to as "virtual assisted living" or the "Maine approach," because Dr. Teel began it in Maine, where he lives in Damariscotta.

Dr. Teel said the program costs about \$400 per month, which he contrasted to "\$10,000 a month out of your own pocket to be in a nursing home" and about half that much to live in an assisted-living home.

He said that full-time assisted living in your own home will run \$15,000 a month, if you can even find someone to be there 24/7.

Dr. Teel said his program plugs in "a whole bunch of technology that is meant to make a more affordable solution."

WebCams, installed with the resident's approval, avoid the expense of having an around-the-clock caregiver at the home 24/7, Dr. Teel said.

He said the password-protected, "cheap and durable" cameras are usually installed in common spaces such as living rooms or kitchens, and that Full Circle America staff remotely access the camera three or four times a day to spot-check how the person is doing. Authorized family and

Maine M.D. develops a system big on technology & social network; puts cost at 80% less than living in a facility.



friends can also check the images.

Motion and door sensors can tell the staff where the resident is, Dr. Teel said.

He said they also use a "quick call button," a version of a "lifeline button."

"We can make this a communication device, rather than just an emergency button," said Dr. Teel. In conjunction with a programmable base station, it can act as a cordless speakerphone.

Skype phones also enhance communications and can be used to allow someone to virtually "attend" meetings such as a book club, Dr. Teel said.

A high-tech pill box can alert the resident when it's time to take medications, and even calls a caregiver if a person ignores several alerts.

The technology can be used to leverage whatever solution is within someone's budget, Dr. Teel said.

Beyond the technological tools, he said that helping a person maintain goals and connections with people, including intergenerationally, "are the things that give people some purpose, and some meaning."

Dr. Teel said they also look to develop a support team, some volunteer, some paid.

Dr. Teel said attitudes towards the elderly need to change. Rather than thinking of the country as swamped by the growing population of elderly, he urges that seniors be seen as a resource that can help the na-

Says people in their 90's are fastest growing age group; a million 100-year-olds by 2050.

The local group "Aging in Place — Glens Falls" brought Dr. Allan "Chip" Teel to Crandall Public Library on Feb. 12 to talk about his "Full Circle America" program in Maine that has had success both caring for and keeping seniors living in their own homes. More than 40 people attended the session. Chronicle photo/David Cederstrom

tion achieve targeted goals and policies.

"Somehow, we have to find ways to do it differently...a better and more affordable way of providing care for people who want to stay at home, in community," Dr. Teel said. "We gotta have a different conversation" than what facility to put an elderly person in.

Dr. Teel said some people, including in government, will remain skeptical about his approach until it has been demonstrated to work in more places than just Maine. Any changes at the federal and state levels will probably take four or five years just to get started, he said.

"This has to come from us," he said. He urged a grass roots approach.

Dr. Teel said more has started to happen, but that he has been "sadly unimpressed" by what he sees as apathy and inertia about looking at fundamentally new approaches for senior living, and a lack of an "inclusive attitude towards aging."

He said that right now, 20% to 25% of Americans are age 65 or older. By 2030, the number of Americans age 65-plus will triple and the number 85-plus will quintuple. By 2050 there will be 1-million people age 100 and up, Dr. Teel said.

The 90-plus age group is the fastest-growing in America, he added.

Nursing homes are not what 90% of people want or 99% can afford, Dr. Teel said.

He said almost all state governments have financial problems, due in large part to the healthcare and residential nursing

home costs, and that nearly 25% of federal money that goes to the states is for nursing home care.

Dr. Teel described himself as "a family doctor from Maine" who has been the medical director at nursing homes and assisted-living facilities, and that he has started assisted-living homes.

About eight years ago, after brainstorming on alternatives for senior living with others in the field, he started working on the Full Circle America concept with a pilot group of about 50 people between 80 and 105 years old, he said.

They looked at what people want to be able to do, what they need, and "how do we do this affordably," in a way that can be replicated in other communities, Dr. Teel said.

"That has been an enormously difficult job, and I would be lying to you if I said we had it all figured out," he said.

He said they developed the program working with about 100 seniors who needed assistance, and were able to keep them in their homes for up to four or five years at 10% to 20% of the cost of caring for a senior in residential facilities.

Dr. Teel wrote a book about the program, *Alone and Invisible — Averting Disaster in Aging America*.

Info: Full Circle America, (888) 873-8817; www.fullcircleamerica.com.

Aging In Place — Glens Falls, (518) 792-3785 or 761-6125; www.aginginplaceglensfalls.org.