

McKnight's **POWER PANEL**

MAKING THE RIGHT PLANS TO SUCCEED

A holistic conversation between four top senior care
and senior living executives on their visions and
strategies for success during and long after COVID-19

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PANELISTS

**James M. Berklan**

Executive editor at McKnight's Long-Term Care News, served as the event's moderator.

The McKnight's Executive Power Panel, an interactive digital roundtable featuring four top senior care and senior living executives, shared their visions and strategies for not just outlasting, but succeeding despite COVID-19.

Taking part were Steve Pacicco, CEO of MatrixCare; Lisa Taylor, CEO of It's Never 2 Late; Mark Anderson, Chief Administrative Officer, Eldermark; and Carl Swan, Senior Vice President, Alliance Insurance Group. *McKnight's Long-Term Care News* Executive Editor James M. Berklan moderated the lively discussion.

The pandemic has hit nursing homes especially hard, with more than 40% of all COVID-19 related deaths involving nursing home personnel. And the numbers are still growing. Providers must move carefully and deliberately with sound principles in order to find effective ways to create better lives moving forward.

Participants first rang in on what they imagined every day routines will eventually evolve into.

"I think the new normal is not as different as we think," said Anderson. "COVID has exposed a lot of gaps for us within things like infection control practices, funding policies and technology adoption. The new normal remains focused on the senior

**Steve Pacicco**

CEO of MatrixCare

MatrixCare's solutions help ACOs, skilled nursing and senior living providers, life plan communities and home health organizations to connect, collaborate and prosper. In addition to purpose-built EHR components, MatrixCare includes solutions to systematically increase clinical quality and create a true, person-centric, e-longitudinal health record.

**Lisa Taylor**

CEO of It's Never 2 Late

It's Never 2 Late is the leading provider of person-centered content for the senior living market. It is a critical part of the resident experience in more than 3,000 assisted and independent living communities, nursing homes, memory care settings and adult day programs across the United States and Canada.

**Mark Anderson**

Chief Administrative Officer, Eldermark

Eldermark is the leading electronic health record and operational technology solution for senior housing providers. The only HIE focused on senior living, Eldermark works to create e-connectivity between providers, residents/patients, physicians, hospitals and vendors to achieve lower care costs, best-informed care decisions and enhanced care experiences.

**Carl Swan**

Senior Vice President, Alliance Insurance Group

Alliance Insurance Group was founded by an elite team of risk management professionals with experience from one of the country's largest national firms. They represent 40 experts and more than \$70 million in premiums across the U.S., specializing in the senior living, distribution, construction, manufacturing, wood products and legal practices industries.

living customer experience, only with new ways of achieving customer satisfaction and optimal wellbeing."

For Taylor, the main difference between how things used to be and how they will be moving forward is focused on communication.

"How are we going to ensure, if something like this happens again, people can communicate with their moms or dads or loved ones?" she asked. "Consumers are going to seek assurances that connection is there, should communities need to self isolate again, and that owner/operators are able to keep their loved ones engaged if they can't leave their community. One of the coolest things I've ever witnessed is the speed with which we have responded to these needs, implementing tools like one-touch video chat and providing other non-clinical solutions to social isolation like music and art therapy."

COVID-19 AS CATALYST

Pacicco pointed out that deficiencies in the U.S. healthcare system have been exposed by COVID — something he imagines will drive change.

"The new normal will be a market that emerges where there's a focus on health, screening, diagnosis and wellness — a kind of pre-acute care if you will, versus post-acute," he said. "I think there's going to be more of a role for post-acute care providers working together with physicians."

For Swan, an important piece of the new normal puzzle is "informed consent."

"One new thing we're working with our insureds on is communicating what someone can expect during COVID when they come into the community," he said. "We developed what we're calling an 'informed consent' form for our insureds that adds to their general procedures



and policies. Working with families to understand what they can expect goes a long way to alleviate anxiety."

He added that moving forward, the smart bet for providers getting reimbursed, doing good business and getting paid well for their work is dependent on cost side increases from an insurance perspective with upcoming renewals.

Department of Health and Human Services had pledged some COVID relief funding relief for private pay AL providers, Anderson noted, "we have to see how that's going to unfold. We've got a vital industry here serving human beings in need and human beings in the most vulnerable part of their life and there's just not enough being done compared to some other business lines."

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— STEVE PACICCO

In response, Anderson quoted a recent report from the National Center for Assisted Living noting, "Currently half of all living providers are operating at a financial loss and of those, 60-plus percent believe they wouldn't be able to stay in operation over the next year if the status quo remains."

Commenting before the

Pacicco pointed out that while the SNF industry had acquired approximately \$10 billion from stimulus packages, it is also one of the sectors hardest hit by COVID-19. "\$10 billion just isn't enough," he said.

"There's that five billion that's being discussed in stimulus four and if we could direct it at least partially



to those in most need, that would be better. I think we also need some liability relief; we need some favorable times on the Medicare reimbursement, even kind of extension of the 1135 waiver would be helpful. Longer term, it's going to be about providers taking risks. Higher returns often go when there are risks taken and I think that's where the market's going to go."

the pandemic with pain points on this topic already; now systems need to be in place to help providers best use the resources they've got — good staffing protocol, good staffing technology and health records systems that can provide efficient workflow."

"As humans, we just want to feel effective and efficient in our jobs,"

"TO SEE FRONTLINE WORKERS ELEVATED AT A NATIONAL LEVEL IS SOMETHING I FEEL HAS BEEN A POSITIVE OUTCOME FROM ALL OF THIS."

— CARL SWAN

STAFFING SOLUTIONS

As for recruitment and retention of frontline caregivers, challenges have always been there. COVID has just exacerbated them, panelists agreed.

"It's getting harder, not easier," admitted Anderson. "We went into

added Taylor. "It doesn't matter what your job is. As a person that's what we all long to do. Those that are caring for seniors ... it's not any different."

For Swan, it's the people caring for seniors who deserve the most recognition.

"To see frontline workers elevated

at a national level is something I feel has been a positive outcome from all of this," said Swan. "The recognition and discussion around the mission-centered work these folks do caring for seniors on the frontlines, those who have fought for our country and have done so much ... I've been encouraged to see them recognized."

LOOKING FOR POSITIVES

Panelists also were challenged with the question: "What good might actually come from the pandemic?" Answers ranged from creative problem-solving, to recognizing frontline caregivers as the heroes they are. They also involved the ways in which technology solutions have strengthened relationships and better learning deliver strong healthcare based on feedback received.

What would be the one thing each panelist wanted viewers to take away from the high-level panel discussion?

"I will quote Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft," said Pacicco. "He said, 'Every company is a software company. You all have to start thinking and operating like a digital company.' I think that is very relevant to our business right now."

"Prioritize your technology budget for 2021," said Taylor.

"I would encourage providers to think about technology solutions not as an expense but as a vital part of what you need in order to best serve your customer," suggested Anderson.

And Swan's concluding advice was: "Continue to work hard on your policies, practices and procedures. Communicate like crazy. Remember to document, document, document so when it comes time to tell your story, you're ready."

The start of blueprints for a time like no other. ■