

# Technology Boosts Quality Of Life At The Boston Home

**A**t The Boston Home (TBH), a not-for-profit nursing care facility that houses some 96 adults with physical disabilities, advanced assistive technology is adding a strong measure of comfort, convenience, and control for residents whose conditions often limit their ability to move freely, communicate effectively, or otherwise navigate their environment.

Thanks in part to the excellent planning and oversight of TBH's clinical services and facilities management departments, a variety of innovative systems that encourage residents to act more autonomously are now in place.

## Wireless Aids

Wireless elevator and door access, overhead lifts, and ergonomic shower chairs are among the latest examples of TBH's progressive approach to technology.

"We're constantly investigating creative ways to give residents more control of their world and promote their independence," says adaptive equipment technician Don Fredette.

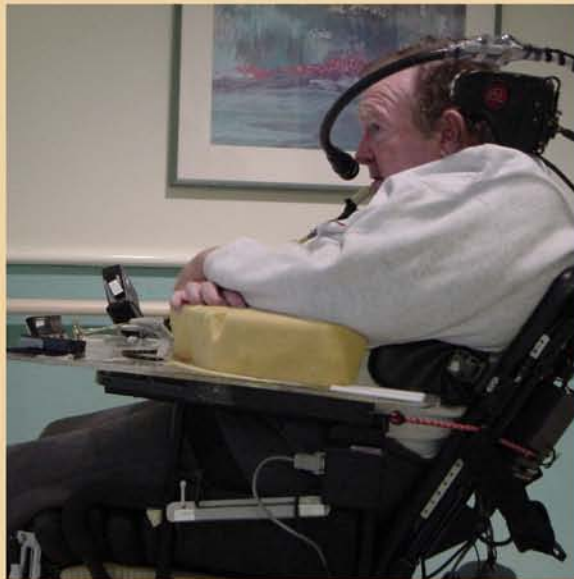
Recent high-tech additions include:

- **Overhead lifts.** Descending from a ceiling track in every resident room is a lift mechanism and sling designed to lift, lower, and move residents to and from their beds, wheelchairs, physical therapy mats, and shower chairs.

According to TBH seating specialist Faith Saftler Savage, the advantages over the former floor lifts are numerous. For one, she says, residents no longer need wait for an available floor lift. In addition, residents are lifted from more of a sitting position, which means that less physical maneuvering is required. This saves lots of time and reduces the risk of injury to both residents and staff. Another big advantage is that no storage space is required.

The lifts will next be added to the facility's physical therapy area, shower rooms, and new resident rooms.

- **Wireless door and elevator access.** Residents no longer need ask staff to push elevator buttons, and they're more apt to move about on their own, says Fredette. When residents are within range (usually 11 feet) of the elevator or door, a wheelchair-mount-



**Wireless technology provides residents easy access to doors and elevators.**

ed pass automatically sends a radio-frequency signal to a "reader" next to the elevator or door. The reader calls the elevator to the floor or opens the door.

"This system is the biggest boost to my independence ever," says TBH resident Lillian Carr.

Adds resident Don Dalpe, "It has saved me from wasting a lot of my time waiting for or stuck on elevators."

Currently, 28 wheelchairs, two elevators, and the facility's new front door are fitted with the wireless technology. And soon, Fredette says, 12 more wheelchairs, two new elevators under construction, and the facility's back door, which leads to a garden area, will also be equipped with the wireless devices.

- **Ergonomic shower chairs.** The power tilt on TBH's four new shower chairs allows staff to ease residents comfortably and securely from the sling to the shower chair. Previously, residents had to lie flat in a shower bed or sit upright in a shower chair. Now, says Savage, "We can put our residents into any position and adjust for any weaknesses. This is the best shower chair I've seen, and residents are very pleased."

## Hands-free Equipment

TBH is also home to a host of hands-free equipment, including wheelchairs; computers; and environmental controls for beds, nurse calls, phones, and TVs. What's next? Ten new resident rooms will be fitted with X10 remote-control technology. With X10, thermostats, lights, TVs, radios, and VCRs plug into sensors that will plug into electrical outlets, and the resident's wireless remote will emit radio-frequency signals to "talk" to the sensors. The remote can be hand-, voice-, or chin-activated, depending on need.

According to TBH's Chief Executive Officer Marva Serotkin, "With our building renovation upgrades and our exciting new technology applications, we are making great strides in maximizing residents' comfort and control in their wheelchairs or beds. Our plan calls for the systematic integration of assistive technology throughout The Boston Home, as well as the optimal fit between resident and technology."

The systems may be very sophisticated, she adds, but the goal is simple: A resident's wish should be technology's command.

*Contributing writer MARVA SEROTKIN is chief executive officer of The Boston Home, Boston.*