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MODULAR MEDICAL HOMES FOR SENIORS

By: Nicole Dube, Associate Analyst

You asked for information on modular medical homes for seniors called “MEDcottages.” You also wanted a brief summary of a 2010 Virginia law allowing their use.

SUMMARY

A MEDcottage is a mobile, modular, medical home temporarily placed on a caregiver’s property to enable seniors (or people recovering from illness or injury) to receive rehabilitation and extended care near their family members. Developed in 2010 by N2Care, these single-occupancy units allow seniors to “age in place” and delay or avoid entering long-term care facilities. They essentially create free-standing hospital rooms equipped with the latest technology, including monitoring vital signs, filtering air of contaminants, communicating with offsite caregivers via video and cell phone, sending medication reminders, and alerting caregivers if an occupant falls.

The first MEDcottage prototype was installed in 2010 on the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University campus. According to N2Care Chief Operating Officer, Susan Conn, two units are currently being manufactured. A unit costs \$85,000 and can be sold back to the distributor once it is no longer needed. In the future, the company plans to lease units for between \$1,500 to \$2,000 per month.

According to Conn, currently MEDcottages can only be purchased in Virginia, but the company plans to add distributors in eight states along the I-95 corridor in the spring of 2012 and in the New England states by 2013.

Although MEDcottages were designed to comply with local zoning ordinances, their use may be prohibited in some states. (Local zoning ordinances often prohibit the placement of a second dwelling on a single-family property.) In 2010, Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell signed a law (HB 1307) allowing temporary health care structures like MEDcottage to be placed on single-family properties without special-use permits required under local zoning ordinances. Instead, they must conform to local rules regulating garages and sheds. Structures cannot exceed 300 square feet and must be removed within 30 days after the occupant no longer needs or receives care in the structure.

MEDCOTTAGES

Each MEDcottage is 288 square feet (12 ft. by 24 ft.) and has a bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen equipped with a microwave, dishwasher, and washer and dryer. Electricity and water are directly connected to the homeowner's utilities. Units contain a virtual companion that monitors vital signs, filters the air for contaminants, sends medication reminders, and communicates with offsite caregivers via video and cell phone text messaging. A video system monitors the floor at ankle level so the occupant maintains privacy, but the caregiver is alerted of a fall. A lift is attached to the bedroom ceiling to move the occupant from the bed to the bathroom, allowing caregivers to avoid heavy lifting. There is also knee-level lighting to illuminate the walls and floors, preventing falls. Table 1 lists MEDcottage features.

Table 1: MEDcottage Features

Environment	Communication	Pathogen Protection
Room temperature and oxygen control	Web camera and voice communications by computer or cell phone	Positive air pressure system for patient protection
Interior and exterior lighting	Ankle or wrist bracelet movement locators	Negative air pressure system for pathogen containment
Water temperature control	Ankle-level video monitoring to detect falls	Air filtration
Monitoring of water levels in the bathtub and sink	Alert necklace providing interactive monitoring	Protective clothing dispenser
Door latching system	Monitoring of vital signs	Hazardous waste disposal
Smoke and carbon monoxide detection	Medication monitoring and notification	
Lift transporting occupants from the bed to the bathroom	Liquid consumption monitoring	

Source: MEDCottage website, <http://medcottage.com/>.

VIRGINIA LAW

In April 2010, Virginia’s governor signed a bill allowing families to place temporary family healthcare structures, like MEDcottages, on property classified as residential without obtaining a special use permit required under local zoning ordinances (HB 1307, codified at [Code of Virginia § 15.2-2292.1](#))

The law defines a “temporary family healthcare structure” as a mobile residential structure that helps caregivers (a family member or legal guardian) care for a person with a physician-certified mental or physical impairment. These structures cannot exceed 300 square feet and must conform to local regulations governing sheds or garages. They must be removed within 30 days after the occupant dies, moves, or no longer needs care.

Before installing a temporary health care structure, the law requires an individual to obtain a permit from the town’s governing body. It allows the town to (1) charge a permit fee of up to \$100, (2) inspect the structure and require an applicant to provide evidence of compliance with the law, and (3) revoke a permit if the permit holder violates the law. (A copy of the law is attached.)

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