



## Long-term perspectives on long-term care

By Gary Gunning

Kathleen Snyder, marketing lead for Ascom's long-term care solutions, discusses how technology can help organizations to meet some of their most pressing challenges - drawing on her career in nursing and healthcare management, as well as her own personal experience with long-term care.



A qualified nurse and MBA and now a senior marketing executive at Ascom, for more than two decades Kathleen Snyder has been driving change in healthcare via technology and digital innovations.

Anybody with any interest in healthcare knows of the litany of challenges facing long-term care: a global shortage of nurses, rapidly ageing populations with complex chronic conditions, the decline of at-home care by extended families, and of course, stringent budget constraints.

"Frontline care is like an iceberg," explains Kathleen Snyder, a qualified nurse and MBA who now works as a senior marketing executive at Ascom. "Casual observers only see the tip of what actually goes on... many lay people are oblivious to the immense amount of work that takes place behind the scenes. Unfortunately, many also don't appreciate the pressure nurses are under. We always—without exception—have to be on our A-game."

But if a lifetime in healthcare has taught Snyder one thing, it is the value of guarded optimism in teamwork and

innovation, despite the challenges. Today, following on from long stints in healthcare and consultancy and years of education, her role at Ascom is one in which both teamwork and innovation are of the utmost importance in helping to face those challenges. And it's a role in which she can put her own experience to use.

Her background in nursing is essential when it comes to championing the causes of the clinicians who, ultimately, use the technology and services Ascom provides. She can also help ensure that development of solutions takes into account their real, on-the-ground needs. And she's one of a team of resident experts, speaking and working from experience thoroughly earned. Her time spent in the world of nursing and long-term care has led to a passion for the importance of new technology and how it can help.



Training is an integral part of a solution.

## Learning from experience on the frontline

Snyder's can-do attitude stems partly from her childhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It's also a legacy of being the daughter of a long-term care nurse. "I guess so," she laughs. "The kids of clinicians grow up deeply aware of the practicalities of frontline healthcare. We see the realities facing doctors and nurses: the long shifts, the emotional investment in the job, the intense teamwork, the need to master technology without ever losing sight of the person behind each patient."

Biology is not destiny, but when it comes to Snyder, it seems she was definitely born to be a healthcare professional. Drawn to nursing as a child, her first ever summer job involved working at a nursing home in Pittsburgh. Her interest naturally evolved into a BSc in nursing, and her first appointment as a nurse at a Pittsburgh hospital. Formerly the linchpin in the US steel-making industry, Pittsburgh underwent rapid deindustrialization and social change following the Second World War. "Working as an Emergency Department nurse in Pittsburgh gave one a really broad experience," says Snyder. "The cases were just so varied. There were the accidents and traumas typical of large urban centers. But Pennsylvania is also a large rural state, so there was a constant stream of recreational and farming-related injuries. You name it, we treated it."

Snyder's time at Pittsburgh did more than hone her clinical expertise. It also schooled her in teamwork, smooth administration, and efficient communication and coordination. As her career progressed, she also became more aware of the technologies and workflow innovations that could help alleviate the burden of behind-the-scenes work that complicates nurses' jobs.

But her understanding of long-term care is founded on more than her vocational and academic background. It is also rooted in the eight years she spent caring for her mother who suffered from dementia before passing away in 2019. Despite the diagnosis, and burdened with a full-time job, Snyder insisted on her mother moving into her family home. "Decisions like this are always individual and rely on a multitude of factors," she says. "Luckily, my mom's condition—and my circumstances—were such that I and my husband could care for her in our home. But that option just isn't appropriate or possible for everyone."

The experience had a deep impact on how Snyder understands long-term care. "Everyone in my situation takes away their own insights. But the experience really confirmed for me a fundamental truth that many of us tend to forget: that nobody wants to be dependent on others. Independence and personal autonomy are key to being human. Anything—whether it's a passive monitoring system, an unobtrusive motion detector, or a discreet personal alarm device—that promotes dignity and autonomy should be embraced and nurtured."

## Channeling experience into innovation

Snyder's developing interest in this type of technology took her back to university and on to an MBA, as well as multiple certifications in various aspects of healthcare and nursing management. "I'm absolutely committed to lifelong learning, whatever role one has in life. But it's especially relevant in a dynamic profession such as nursing. After all, advances in therapies and technology are pretty useless if frontline clinicians are lacking the appropriate competencies. And this is one of the best things about my role at Ascom: being able to develop and introduce technologies that keep the



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nursing community front and center. For us, training is not an afterthought; it is instead an integral part of a solution." After several years in management and administration, and after running her own consultancy firm, she joined Ascom in October 2017, assuming the position of Senior Global Segment Marketing Manager for Long-Term Care in early 2020. Since the role involves addressing and working with a community of nurses and clinicians, her experience working in the field is invaluable. Her insight helps the engineers at Ascom develop the right solutions, too: letting practical expertise inform innovation.

Snyder says that her role can be distilled into "one core objective: to harness mobile communication technologies to improve staff coordination and promote independence and quality of life for long-term care residents. Now, how we go about this of course varies between facilities and circumstances. But where we at Ascom can really make a difference is with complete integrated solutions."

"That's because we, uniquely, offer every component—smartphones, mobile devices, nurse call systems, alarm notification management systems, and wander management solutions. Moreover, we are vendor and technology neutral, so our solutions work with facilities' existing and planned third-party equipment, sensors and medical devices."

Her personal encounter with dementia care impressed on Snyder the importance of what she calls "predictive technologies." Such systems create a baseline, or a set of parameters, that map an individual's everyday behavior. The system can then detect anomalies or deviations from these parameters, and transmit context-rich alerts to pre-selected members of staff.

"Ascom SmartSense is an example of just such a solution," says Snyder. "Put simply, it uses a combination of algorithms, passive in-room sensors, and mobile devices to detect and trigger alarm notifications about unusual behavior. So say a resident spends longer than usual in the bathroom in the middle of the night, an alert will be automatically sent to a designated caregiver's mobile device. But it doesn't end there. Should the caregiver be unable to respond, the alert is automatically diverted to colleagues until the system registers an appropriate response. It's a smart way of ensuring residents get the individual attention they need, and of anticipating issues in advance."

For Snyder, using these types of technology to help nurses is a task that needs to be carried out on two fronts. On one hand, she and her colleagues draw on their expertise to work as 'digital advocates' for nurses and other clinicians, ensuring their real-life needs are paramount when Ascom engineers devise workflow solutions. "Part of our job is to be surrogate clinicians—a sort of channel between them and our technicians. On the other hand, I—and all the other qualified clinicians now working at Ascom—see ourselves as 'internal ambassadors' for the caring professions. We work to raise the profile of nurses and other clinicians within our organization, and I'm thrilled by the positive response we are receiving."

### **Future trends in long-term care**

Snyder agrees with many long-term care experts that the most serious challenge facing healthcare systems is a combination of staff shortages and rapidly increasing patient and resident numbers, especially of those suffering from dementia. But she also sees long-term care undergoing a fundamental transformation in how it is perceived and treated by policy makers.



Part of a series of articles celebrating Ascom's nurses and the WHO International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.

"In the not-too-distant past," she explains, "long-term care was widely seen as an old age home. Expectations were low, technological innovation was limited, staff training was often inadequate. But now, with people living for decades after retirement, and with more and more families affected by Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia, the focus has shifted to dignity and life enhancement—and there has been a technological revolution to enable this."

According to Snyder, the sea-change in long-term care has pushed the demand for auditing and related solutions. "Families of elderly residents or long-term care patients increasingly want independent verification of actions taken and care delivered. That's one reason why we're seeing a steady increase in demand for systems that automatically detect the presence of staff members, and that log staff activity."

The regulatory aspect of long-term care will, she believes, become particularly important due to current global circumstances: and, as a result, particularly demanding. "The rise in the elderly population is being accompanied by a rise in reporting standards. And in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, we can expect to see a radical tightening of these demands."

In the long run, however, Snyder sees a deep continuity in long-term care. The basic tools of such care, she insists, transcend technology. "Of course, technical solutions enable us to be more efficient in delivering top-quality care."

"But nothing can ever replace a motivated, well trained and properly equipped nurse. And this fact actually gives me deep job satisfaction, as I know I'm not replacing nurses, but am helping nurses to exploit technology in order to help others."

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