

Seniors Today Demand Greater Mobility

(ARA) - Seniors are more mobile today than ever before and with the Baby Boomer generation set to join the ranks of older Americans, the demand for greater mobility is expected to dramatically increase. Census Bureau projections indicate that by 2030 one in five Americans will be age 65 or older. This means by the year 2030 the senior population will have increased by 75 percent to more than 69 million Americans over age 65.

Studies suggest that Baby Boomers (typically defined as those born in the years 1946 to 1964) are more active, exercising more than ever before and paying critical attention to their long-term health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the baby boomer generation accounted for more than half of all visits to the doctor in 2001.



“We know seniors will be healthier but they will also live longer and there are just certain risk levels that increase with age. Mobility is one area often affected because seniors are at greater risk for falls, injury or certain diseases such as diabetes. The good news is that the market is responding with innovative products to help seniors stay active and get around more freely,” says Dave Jacobs, president, Medline Durable Medical Equipment division.

Portable oxygen is an excellent example of how senior demand is already driving innovations that enhance mobility. In the past, seniors who needed oxygen (such as those who had suffered from emphysema) were restricted by the oxygen delivery system which was often a large, difficult to transport, in-home machine. “Seniors today do not accept these types of restrictions. They wanted oxygen equipment that would allow them to maintain an active lifestyle,” says Dennis Cook, a licensed respiratory therapist and president of Medline’s Respiratory Division. “The market responded with the development of Oxygen Conserving Devices (OCD). These devices attach to a small lightweight oxygen cylinder and allow the patient to engage in mainstream lifestyle activities outside the home. Because OCD’s are so light, a patient can easily carry their oxygen while using a wheelchair, scooter or rollator.”

Walking aids such as rollators (which are essentially walkers with wheels and seats) and lightweight transport chairs were not available 10 years ago. Rollators were introduced to the market about five years ago and they allow seniors to walk more smoothly and independently again. Transport chairs are also relatively new to the market place. These are aluminum, extremely lightweight, affordable wheelchairs that have small wheels and fold back so they can be easily stored in the trunk of a car.

“Mobility aids are being updated and improved every year, from wheelchairs that have quick-release wheels to a wide range in scooters that are more attractive and more affordable. In addition, mobility aids are more accessible with many retail stores offering basic mobility items such as crutches, walkers and rollators,” says Jacobs.

He adds that for a wider range of mobility and ambulatory aids, there are 10,000 home medical equipment (HME) dealers nationwide many of whom either work directly with hospitals and physicians or operate retail stores. At an HME store a senior can purchase anything from a scooter or powered wheelchair to bath safety items such as grab bars, to fashion quad-canes. (A quad-cane is a cane with four feet that offers greater stability.)

For more information about devices that can make your life easier call (800) MEDLINE (633-5463)