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## What's up, Doc? Robots

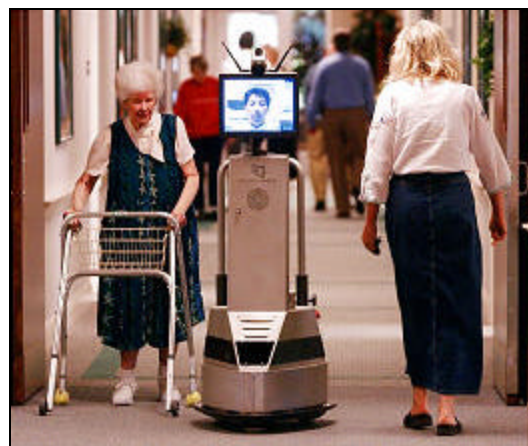
Utah facility is using one to help visit, diagnose patients

By Eric Nelson

Deseret Morning News

Science fiction movies are becoming a reality in the Salt Lake area — robots are entering the work force.

Meet the mobile robot, M.D., Utah's first medical assistant.



A robot called Companion moves down a hall at the Silverado Senior Living Center, a speciality Alzheimer's community, at 1430 E. 4500 South.

*Scott G. Winterton, Deseret Morning News*

Silverado Senior Living, a speciality Alzheimer's community in Salt Lake County, unveiled its medical robot to the public recently in an attempt to demonstrate its ability to assist caregivers with the mounting ranks of elderly and ill patients.

While its bedside manner may not provide the most loving hand, or even a hand at all, the robot can assist in visiting and diagnosing dozens of patients that human specialists don't have the time or resources to visit personally.

"The robot allows health-care professionals to help many more patients much more inexpensively," said Tim Wright, vice president of marketing for InTouch Health, the company that manufactured the robot.

"Care centers simply don't have the resources to staff each facility with every expert. But with the robot, many of those experts can be at every facility."

But not to worry. The mobile robot, called the Companion, is not drawing blood, performing surgery or even trying to replace human help. Instead, it is more of a communication device between patients at Silverado Senior Living and caregivers in other parts of the country.

"It was designed to allow more one-on-one communication between doctors and patients," said Michael Chan, vice president of business development at InTouch Health. "It allows doctors to actually see what's going on, rather than having to travel hundreds of miles or having to hear it from a patient or caregiver over the phone."

While many larger hospitals are staffed with a wide range of medical experts, most senior care facilities can't afford the bill. As

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a result, most of these facilities share experts among a number of other facilities. For example, Silverado shares a dementia, operations and clinical expert, as well as registered nurses, psychologists and a medical doctor, with 12 other care centers.

"You can imagine that traveling to all 12 of our communities takes up a lot of time and money," said Mark Mostow, Silverado's Vice President of Sales and Marketing. "With the Companion, our doctors don't have to waste so much time sitting in a plane. Instead they are spending the travel time actually communicating with patients and staff."

Many medical experts who only had time to visit the Silverado facility every four to six weeks are now able to check in several times a day, Mostow said.

The robot is controlled from an off-site console, usually by a doctor or medical expert. The expert moves the robot using a joystick to control the movement of the robot's head and body, which hover atop three moving balls. The robot is equipped with a video camera, enabling the expert to see, hear and talk to patients thousands of miles away via a broadband wireless Internet connection. Patients are able to communicate with the caregiver, who appears on a television screen on the robot's head.

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Armond Perri, right, a patient, and InTouch Health Vice President Tim Wright talk to Companion at Silverado Senior Living Center.

*Scott G. Winterton, Deseret Morning News*

The robot, which a spokesman at InTouch said was "the first of its kind," is one of four in the United States and the first in Utah. Silverado rents the mobile robot from InTouch at a cost of \$3,000 a month. But the cost has been worth it, according to Loren Shook, chief executive of Silverado Senior Living.

In addition to the training, coaching and monitoring medical professionals can provide from off-site locations, the robot also allows medical experts to share their time and expertise to care facilities across the country at a fraction of the cost, she said.

Although the robot draws a few strange looks from Silverado patients, most don't seem to mind the virtual help as opposed to personal assistance.

"It seems like (the doctor) can still help me out, so why do I have to worry?" said Leona Lambillotte, a patient at Silverado.

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