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"Robot Nurse" Helping Salt Lake Care Facility

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Ed Yeates reporting

A robot is roaming the halls of a Salt Lake extended care center these days, talking and interacting with residents and staff - in a most unusual way.

The machine may not look like much from the neck down. But the face changes continually, taking on personalities people recognize.

"Companion" is a mobile machine developed by a company called Intouch Health. At the Silverado extended care center, "Companion" is currently roaming halls, talking to residents and helping in the training of staff.

It's driven by whomever is behind the controls - some distance away at Silverado's headquarters in California - or from a room in the facility itself.

The robot has 24 infrared sensors - giving a lot of information to the masters who drive it.

Tim Wright, Intouch Health, Inc: "For example, if I'm standing here talking with you and while we're talking a resident comes up behind us, I can sense that. I can see that someone is there."

Today, Steve Winner in California is watching and talking through Companion to Silverado staffers and residents in Salt Lake.

Through the robot, he can evaluate the center's activities program. A clinical director could make an early assessment of a patient's condition - like watching the gait of someone with Parkinson's Disease - and then offering suggestions to the caregiver who is there interacting with that resident.

Watching, talking, listening, training. This robot does it all.

Is it the wave of the future? Yes. And modifications now on the drawing board for Companion will have it doing even more.



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