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**'Companion' robot represents the future in nursing home care**

10/28/2003 6:40 PM  
By: Kristi Nakamura

The new face of nursing home caregivers has rolled into the Silverado Senior Living Center in Cypresswood.

It's called the Companion, and California-based [InTouch Health](#) is hoping this robot will alleviate the country's shortage of doctors and nurses by allowing for virtual visits across hundreds of miles.



InTouch Health representative Tim Wright demonstrates the Companion.

"A health care professional, a nurse, a trainer can sit down at a care station in California and join the staff here, and then 15 minutes later, join the staff in Salt Lake City, and then 15 minutes later join the staff in a facility 90 miles north of L.A., and accomplish what would have taken days to accomplish by driving," said InTouch representative Tim Wright.

The Companion is connected to a human counterpart whose face appears on the screen.

With a joystick, monitor, and a keyboard, a doctor or nurse in another location can see and hear a patient from hundreds of miles away and make a recommendation or diagnosis.

InTouch Health officials say the Companion is not meant to replace doctors, nurses and other caregivers, it's meant to help health care experts who are already spread thin see and answer questions for multiple patients in multiple places without hopping on a plane, sitting in traffic or driving for hours.

"So this is a means to bring clinical experts into communities like Silverado at the very easy drop of a hat, by just simply logging on," said InTouch representative Mark Mostow.

And so far the response from patients and their families is positive.

"If it's right here and they can take him over in front of it and get some medical advice, rather than taking him out to a doctor and sitting in a waiting room and waiting and waiting, then, I mean, how much better can it get?" said Susan Skains, a patient's daughter.

Skains may not believe it, but Silverado officials say there are still better features to come.

They are hopeful that in the future, the Companion will not just be used for medical visits. The next step is to use the robot to help family members in other states visit their loved ones at the home more frequently.

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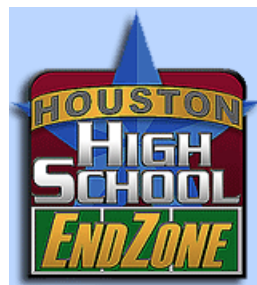
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