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Making a Case for Air Purification Systems in Retirement Home Communities

April 7, 2011 – Toronto, Canada - As people age, their immune and respiratory systems weaken and become more susceptible to illness. Airborne viruses and bacteria are a primary concern for seniors, therefore controlling them can reduce the chances of residents who live in retirement communities of becoming ill during flu season.

The Toronto Public Health noted in their January 5th, 2011 surveillance update report, “a marked rise in influenza activity”. From 2004 thru 2009, “515 laboratory confirmed cases of influenza had been reported within a comparable 5-year season-to-date average of 81 cases. The 2009 statistical Outbreaks reported Long term care communities had represented 38% of the total enteric outbreak by risk setting where the means of 1 out of 33 seniors who contracted a communicable disease resulted in death.

Furthermore, a 2008 study published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*² and was the work of Dr Steffen Loft of the Institute of Public Health, Department of Environmental Health, Copenhagen, in Denmark, concluded the following: ***“Reduction of particle exposure by filtration of re-circulated indoor air for only 48 hours improved MVF (microvascular function) in healthy elderly citizens, suggesting that this may be a feasible way of reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.”***

Scarborough Retirement Centre

Scarborough Retirement Centre is a 130 resident boutique retirement community with 79 employees. The community experienced an Enteric Outbreak¹ of the etiological agent Noro virus like strain during the months of December 8th 2009 and was declared over by January 12th, 2010.

During the 2009 Outbreak, restrictions were placed by the Public Health inspector on admission and re-admissions into Scarborough Retirement Centre. Forty-six of the 130 resident population and six staff members were at risk. As result of the outbreak, three suites became vacant and could not be leased to any new prospects calling to tour the community.

In October 2010, owner Marie-Josée Lafontaine researched for the best air purification system that would effectively manage airborne viruses during the four month flu season. Early December 2010, Surgically Clean Air units were purchased and strategically placed in the common areas located on two levels. Within 24 hours following the installation, residents noticed the difference, as such gave management a standing round of applause during resident council meeting.

Executive Director, Debbie Casquenet has suffered from Asthma for the past 12 years. Previous to the Surgically Clean Air units being deployed, Debbie used an aerosol inhaler 4 to 5 times a day to assist with her breathing. After the Surgically Clean Air units were deployed, Debbie cut down her need for the inhaler by at least 75%.

During weekly management meetings, anecdotal evidence of the new air purification system was discussed to determine its effectiveness. Francis Luz, Manager of Health and Wellness observed a marked reduction of respiratory issues due to allergies and viral illnesses among her staff and residents. Ms. Luz who is also an allergy sufferer herself said, "I no longer take medication to calm down my symptoms when I am at work".

Not only did residents who suffered from respiratory issues experience improvement, family visitors and prospects also commented on the "fresh-air-feeling" when they entered the lobby. During the winter months in 2011, Scarborough Retirement Centre experienced more traffic and increased occupancy as a result of competitive communities experiencing an outbreak. Having an air purification system also became a compelling market differentiator.

Maureen Scordamaglia, Community Relations Manager responsible for marketing Scarborough Retirement Centre found the selling point of clean air to be a plus. Visiting prospects were so impressed with the proactive stance with installing an air purification system that they asked "why don't other communities have it as well?"

Ms. Lafontaine says that "***purchasing Surgically Clean Air in Scarborough Retirement Centre was an important operational decision not only because it demonstrated how we took the health and wellness of our staff and residents to heart, but how it also made a difference to the bottom line***". With such positive results, the next step for Scarborough Retirement Centre is to place air purification units in each resident suite.

Responsible, Preventative and Proactive Care Benefits

- Reduce likelihood of an enteric outbreak
- Remove harmful toxins, pollutants and airborne microbial contamination
- Manage attrition and occupancy
- Manage revenue
- Save on carpet and mattress replacement when turning over a suite for new residents
- Reduce unpleasant odours (including Beauty Salon, crafts and building maintenance issues)
- Save on chemical mists to cover odours
- Suite turnover (Preparing the suite for a new resident with 24 hour air scrubbing)
- Positive PR - a market differentiator
- Reduce staff absenteeism
- Increase alertness and mental energy
- Show your staff and residents that you care
- Low maintenance
- Lastly, doing the right thing!

¹ **Enteric Outbreak:** The criteria for the Toronto Health Department to declare this community in an outbreak is if six residents or more have contracted the virus. Control measures are established by the Outbreak Management team in consultation with the Toronto Public Health.

² **American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine** Vol 177. pp. 419-425, (2008). First published online October 11 2007 as doi:10.1164/rccm.200704-632OC

"Indoor Particles Affect Vascular Function in the Aged: An Air Filtration-based Intervention Study."

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