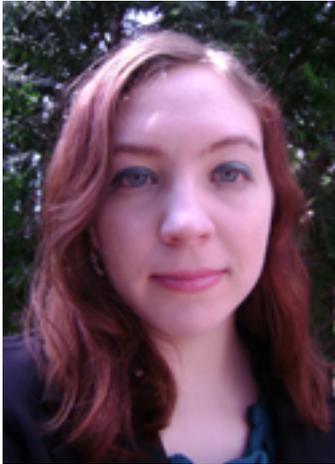


# Lower healthcare costs could mean less human interaction

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For those who live alone, good medical care is all the more important. The machine-to-machine (M2M) communications business is growing, and the prevalence of wireless connectivity could [push down](#) [1] the price of healthcare for the elderly, especially — but at the greater cost of human interaction.

The field is called telehealth, or the delivery of medical services (such as diagnosis and monitoring) via telecommunications technology. It could replace the need for traditional caregivers, who help the elderly with daily living and treat patients in an estimated 18 million households across the United States. Their duties can be extremely intensive and both emotionally and physically taxing; these caregivers are either paid professionals or family members and friends.

For the old, these regular visits matter for reasons more than check-ups and mobility. Social interaction can [reduce problems](#) [2] such as high blood pressure and lower the risk for more serious diseases, such as Alzheimer's. This kind of engagement can [boost](#) [3] mental health as well and improve overall well-being.

Many family members keep a close eye on the elderly because of the increased likelihood of accidents — notably, falls in the home, from which the person couldn't recover without help. Installing handrails and seats in the shower, for example, can only do so much to prevent these occurrences. I know my parents, aunts, and uncles worry about my grandparents losing their footing or suffering a more severe episode, like a stroke or heart attack, when no one else is around.

Because of that, personal emergency response systems (PERS) are becoming a more regular part of care. In the future, more of these will use integrated cellular modules so they can work anywhere and anytime as opposed to home-only use. Last year, only 15 percent of PERS products shipped with cellular M2M connectivity; that should jump to 61 percent in 2017.

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Similar devices could monitor patients' health and safety remotely by tracking heart health, vital signs, and even medication usage through a "connected pill box." All of this could one day eliminate the need for frequent home visits, and while they're wonderful advancements, they could have negative effects on an elderly person's social health.

Money is an important factor for businesses and patients alike, and M2M is cheaper and more convenient thanks to the declining cost of chipsets and sensors. As we get older, we need to think not only about our parents or grandparents but ourselves as well. The average healthcare expense for retiring in 2013 is [\\$220,000](#) [4]. That figure covers the last 20-25 years of life (from retirement at 65 until the average life expectancy at 80 or 85 years), but it doesn't include the costs of long-term care or nursing home expenses, which eat up retirement savings. That big number has even dropped 8 percent, too, from \$240,000 last year.

Now, \$220,000 is a good estimate if you don't have employer-provided retiree healthcare coverage, and many employers aren't under obligation to provide these benefits. For many, M2M technologies could be a huge help.

Not every family lives close to their elderly like mine does, either. Children become adults and leave for all parts of the country or even the world. Friends grow old, too, or distant, and it can be hard to find people to rely on later in life — especially those who can shoulder the burden. That's why paid caregivers can be so important, and M2M could be critical for people who struggle to afford regular care.

But which is scarier: an elderly life with strong social interaction and high financial stress or a hermit with lower medical costs?

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### Links:

[1] <http://www.technewsworld.com/story/77898.html>

[2] <http://www.griswoldhomecare.com/blog/engagement-for-the-elderly-why-social-interaction-is-crucial/>

[3] <http://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardkrooks/2012/08/23/social-interaction-study-highlights-loneliness-and-isolation-as-health-risks-for-elders/>

[4] [http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/health-care-in-retirement-probably-costs-more-than-you-think/2013/05/16/600b0972-be3a-11e2-9b09-1638acc3942e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/health-care-in-retirement-probably-costs-more-than-you-think/2013/05/16/600b0972-be3a-11e2-9b09-1638acc3942e_story.html)