

N2Care debuts MedCottage, a portable dwelling for elder relatives

Advertisement

By Fredrick Kunkle
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A small Virginia firm hoping to revolutionize the way Americans care for aging family members has unveiled its first prototype of a portable, high-tech dwelling that would provide temporary shelter for a sick or elderly relative in their family's back yard.

On Monday, N2Care, a company formed by a Methodist minister in Salem, Va., showed off its first [MedCottage](#), a 12-by-24-foot prototype filled with biometric technology that would allow a family and health-care providers to monitor the condition of an aging or disabled relative. The cottage contains air-filtration systems, video links, devices that allow the remote monitoring of vital signs and sensors that could detect an occupant's fall.

Until now, the MedCottage had been an idea on [paper](#) only. Even before the prototype was trotted out, however, the company's concept had received an important endorsement: the Virginia General Assembly this year passed legislation, [HB1307](#), that supersedes local zoning laws and allows families to install such a dwelling on their property with a doctor's order.

[AARP](#), the lobbying group for aging Americans, has said local zoning laws pose one of the biggest obstacles to making such dwellings a practical solution to caring for aging family members in what it calls "[accessory dwelling units](#)."

Although the bill passed almost unanimously and was signed into law by Virginia Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R), detractors have dubbed the concept the "granny pod" and predicted that it could create conflicts between neighbors who find the dwellings unsightly. Some critics also worry that the setup could lead to cases of neglect involving elderly or disabled occupants of the dwellings.

The Rev. Ken Dupin, pastor of the [Salem Wesleyan Church](#), created the MedCottage as an alternative to nursing homes as 78 million baby boomers head toward retirement. The idea came about after years of supervising aid missions to Latin America and seeing the need for temporary, modular hospital rooms. As a minister in Northern Virginia and elsewhere, Dupin had also encountered aging people who were distressed at the prospect of moving into nursing homes far from family when they could no longer care for themselves.

Following some further modifications, the prototype will next go to Virginia Tech for field tests, Dupin said Monday. After wrapping up about 20 interviews late Monday, including one with a Swedish network, he said full-scale production could begin around Jan. 1.

The company envisions that families could purchase or lease a MedCottage and set it up on their property, hooking it up to their home's electrical and water supplies like an RV.

Nancy Thompson, a spokeswoman for AARP, said the MedCottage has some of the features the organization advocates in accessory dwelling units, but not all of the universal design features that could be useful for people of all ages. She said it's a step in the right direction for accessory dwelling units. Other companies seeking to make similar structures are Seattle-based FabCab (whose name comes from Fabulous Cabin), and San Francisco-based Larson Shores Architects, which designs what it calls "Architectural Solutions for the Aging Population," or ASAP, and its "Inspired In-Law" dwellings.

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