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Caregiver Thought Leader Interview with Bryan Stapp • August 24, 2016

## EDITOR'S PEN

Gary Barg, Editor-in-Chief

### Caregiver Thought Leader Interview: Bryan Stapp

President, Medical Care Alert

**Gary Barg:** What do we mean when we hear people say medical alert systems or personal emergency response systems?

**Bryan Stapp:** What we are really talking about is a service primarily triggered by a button. The senior is going to wear a button on their wrist or around their neck. If they need help because they have fallen or are short of breath, if they have a fire or there is an intruder, whatever it may be, you press the button. It goes directly to an emergency response center where they have your information. We know who you are and we know where you are. The operator will speak with the senior over the 2-way voice device, and either dispatch emergency services or call someone on their contact list. At its core, that is what the service is.

**Gary Barg:** I think anything that keeps our loved ones living at home safer, and longer is a good thing. How does your system work?

**Bryan Stapp:** The technology relies on two things. One is the phone line, and second is the type of button you want to wear. If you have a traditional dial tone line, we are going to communicate over that line to the emergency response center in the event of an emergency. There is typically going to be a whole house, two-way voice speakerphone placed centrally in the home. A very sensitive microphone is

going to hear you, pretty much wherever you are. You will have a button that has about a 1,000 foot range, which is about three football fields in any direction. So, if you fall in the yard or at the mailbox, you can press the button and we will know that you have signaled for help. A lot of people have their phone service bundled with cable (VoIP) and we can accommodate that, as well.

What people are opting more often is a self-contained, all-in-one pendant with GPS and cellular, that allows them to go anywhere in the United States. So, if they are traveling, working, or vacationing, they can take this with them and always be connected.

The buttons are getting smaller, lighter, and easier to use. Now, they come with built in fall detection algorithms as an option or can be completely self-contained with the communication device, the fall detection, and the GPS, all in one two-ounce pendant.

**Gary Barg:** So, what happens when you press the button?

**Bryan Stapp:** When you press the button, it is going to signal our emergency response center. On their computer screen, they are going to know exactly who and where you are. Then, they will assess your situation and come across the speaker phone and say, "Mrs. Jones, are you okay?" If Mrs. Jones is able to talk, she is going to tell us what is going on. We will take the appropriate action, which might be as simple as calling a neighbor or a family member to come over and take care of something.

The only time we are going to dispatch an ambulance is if there is a true emergency. If somebody tells us that they are hurt or are having shortness of breath and need an ambulance or if we cannot make voice contact, we will assume the worst and will dispatch an ambulance.

We also contact the people on your emergency contact list, both by calling and texting them. At that point, the pre-verified emergency services that dispatch the closest to that location will be sent out and will render help. The important thing to know is that we don't send an ambulance unless needed. Most calls require just a family member or a neighbor, but if we do need to dispatch somebody, we are going to contact all of the people on your emergency contact list.

**Gary Barg:** In an earlier conversation, I told you about a friend of mine who at 70 literally fell between her toilet and bathtub and was stuck for hours. Her daughter had to break her front door down. When you talk about the solution

where you can just yell out if you do not want to wear your button or have it on you, that is just paradigm shifting.

**Bryan Stapp:** The technology is similar to an Amazon Echo or iPhone's Siri, where you can say a command like, "Help me," or something to that effect that will trigger the response.

**Gary Barg:** You have something else that I really like the sound of. It is the AutoFALL, fall detection button. How does that work?

**Bryan Stapp:** The AutoFALL detection uses an algorithm matched against tens of thousands of actual falls. When it determines the fall has actually occurred, it will signal the unit to call the emergency response center on your behalf, and you do not have to press the button.

That is a huge comfort to a lot of people knowing that if they fall, if they blackout, if they hit their head, if they are unable to speak, if they are panicking, that the system can handle it for them. That is where this technology has just gotten better and better of the last couple of years.

**Gary Barg:** You are right. It is about the best utilization of technology. But I think what is most important to the end user is service. You have been awarded the Super Service award by Angie's List readers in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Why, in particular, do you think service is so important to senior medical alert users?

**Bryan Stapp:** Well, I think nobody gets a medical alert system because they just want to. They get it because either there has been a situation where somebody has fallen or there has been some other incident that has caused them to look into this, or they are at a crossroads between whether somebody can continue to live at home independently or have to make other arrangements.

So, if you make that trying experience more difficult by putting people on hold, by not returning their calls, or emails, or by having a difficult to understand return policy, etc., you just really made the experience so much more difficult for the caregiver and the family member, who is in the middle of a situation they do not want to be in anyway.

We put ourselves in those shoes and say, "How would we want to be treated? How would we want our parents to be treated if they were calling in?" I think that is why we keep winning awards for customer service.

**Gary Barg:** How do you advise a family caregiver who needs the system I

order to keep their loved one at home, but is getting push-back from the senior loved one?

**Bryan Stapp:** That is very common. People think back to the old commercials of the lady that has fallen in the bathroom screaming, “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.” They conjure up that image in their mind of this very feeble old person and don’t want to be that person. I agree. I do not want to be that either. So, we provide a lot of education, articles, and feedback to the caregivers we work with who need to convince mom or dad. But, it can be a difficult conversation. You cannot force them, nor should you. Sometimes people need to be faced with the reality of a tough conversation along the lines of “Either you do this or you cannot live alone anymore,” as well. That is not fun for anybody, but sometimes that is the reality of the situation and we have to come to terms with it. We have advice on our website on how to have those conversations.

**Gary Barg:** You also have advice on [medicalcarealert.com](https://www.medicalcarealert.com) on how to work with our senior loved ones about making sure their house is safe.

**Bryan Stapp:** Yes, we have a lot of education. There are articles such as 50 ways to prevent falls and fall prevention guides that are available. There are bathroom safety guides and kitchen safety guides. We also have a blog called “Thrive” that has a lot of good advice and videos.

**Gary Barg:** How do we work with you?

**Bryan Stapp:** It is very easy to get started. You can order directly online at [medicalcarealert.com](https://www.medicalcarealert.com), or call us at 855-272-1010 and speak to a representative. I generally recommend that people talk to somebody, because we have so many options that you really want to talk through the layout of the house, how mobile is mom or dad, what are their preferences, things like that so we really get them into the right system. Then you have a 30-day return policy to try it risk-free. If it is not right for you, we can exchange it for another system or if it is not just something that is going to work out for you, you can send it back and we will refund your money. So, there is no hassle there.

We ship typically the next business day, and you will have it in two to three days. It takes just a few minutes to set it up. If you have any questions, call customer service. It is really easy to do.

**Gary Barg:** What would your most important piece of advice for a family caregiver be?

**Bryan Stapp:** First and foremost, caregivers have to take care of themselves because the caregiving role is more stressful than perhaps they realize. They

have their own lives to manage, but now they are dealing with an array of different emotions. If they are having to get involved with medical and insurance plans, they have now walked into some kind of a Byzantine Rubik's cube that nobody can understand. They are always being second-guessed or questioned by other family members. They have to be kind to themselves. They have got to go easy on themselves. They have got to take time for themselves.

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