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BRIEFING

Japan is running out of people to take care of the elderly, so it's making robots instead

DANIELLE MUOIO | NOV 22, 2015, 9:00 AM



Countries around the world are grappling with how to care for a growing population of elderly people.

The percentage of the US population aged 65 or older is currently at 13%, but that number is expected to *nearly double* by 2050, [according to the Pew Research Center](#).

But the United States isn't even close to the oldest nation in the world — that title is reserved for Japan.

In fact, 20% of Japan's current population is 65 or older.

But as countries witness a climbing number of seniors, the amount of caregivers remains stagnant.

This is particularly a problem in Japan, as a nearly 300-page [Merrill Lynch report](#) projects a shortage of 1 million caregivers by 2025 for the country.

To address the issue, Japanese companies are leading in the development of Carebots.

Carebots are robots specifically designed to assist elderly people, and it's an industry that's growing in a big way. One-third of the Japanese government's budget is allocated to developing carebots.

The global personal robot market, which includes carebots, could reach \$US17.4 billion by 2020, according to the Merrill Lynch report.

For example, Honda's Asimo robot is an autonomous, humanoid robot that could help the elderly by getting them food or turning off lights.

"ASIMO was designed to help those in society who need assistance," said Satoshi Shigemi, senior chief engineer of humanoid robots in Japan, [at an event last year](#).



YouTube/ Plastic Pals

Robobear can pick you up.

The International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), an independent organisation that sets standards for 164 member countries, recently created a new standard to ensure interactions between carebots and humans remain safe — highlighting a growing number of robots of this nature.

The standard — formally called the ISO 13482 standard for service robots — allows for “close human-robot interactions so that there will be protection against litigation in the event of an accident occurring,” Gurvinder Virk, a professor of robotics who helped lead the creation of the ISO standard, told Tech Insider.

There are three categories that fall under the ISO standard: physical assistant robots, mobile servant robots, and person carrier robots.

The Panasonic Resyone carebot was the first robot to officially meet the standard for service robots.

Resyone is a robotic device that transforms from an bed to an electric wheelchair, eliminating the need for multiple caregivers.



Like Resyone, a humanoid robot called Robobear, could also eliminate the need for multiple caregivers by helping transfer seniors from the bed to a wheelchair. The nursing robot, which is still in the experimental phase and was designed by engineers from [Japan's research institution RIKEN](#), is capable of lifting people.

Sales of robots designed specifically to assist elderly people are expected to reach 12,400 units between 2015 and 2018, with that number expected to “increase substantially” over the next 20 years, according to the Merrill Lynch report.

And it goes beyond personal care robots too. [Robot cats are currently being sold to keep seniors company.](#)

Robots in general are becoming increasingly popular in different spheres, from [the kitchen](#) to [construction](#), but it seems likely that your first interaction with one may be at your grandparents' house.

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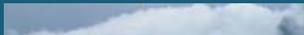
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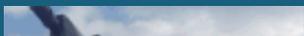
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