Potential for Change

Transforming public awareness and demand for health and care technology

CARERS UK
the voice of carers

Introduction

As society both enjoys the benefits and grapples with the challenges of an ageing population, we need to accelerate adoption of health and care technologies, as an essential part of squaring the circle of reduced public spending and growing demand for health and care services.

The steady march of technology into our workplaces, homes and public services has delivered time and cost-saving changes which have transformed the ways in which many of us live our lives. Yet the use of health and care technologies is still often spoken of as an area of 'potential' that is yet to be realised.

Many of the technologies which are now a normal part of our lives have been driven by grassroots, consumer demand. We discover how technological products, services and tools can help in small ways or transform our lives, and then we become advocates and promoters to friends, families and colleagues – making comments and recommendations online and telling technology providers what needs to be improved and developed.

If we are to realise the potential that health and care technologies have to help promote good health and deliver good care, then it is vital to understand public awareness of and attitudes towards health and care technologies. Only in this way can we understand why the potential of technology has not yet been realised, and take the action required to make it happen.

Heléna Herklots
Chief Executive, Carers UK

The research

In July 2013, Carers UK commissioned YouGov to examine public attitudes to using technology to support caring for older and disabled loved ones.

Technology enables shopping, chatting and leisure. But not caring.

For many people, technology is fully embedded in their lives. From burglar alarms to sat-navs, from chatting with relatives on Skype to booking a lastminute.com holiday, buying insurance on comparison websites and using online banking services – technology is often a normal and essential part of daily living.

Our polling showed that:

- More than 7 in 10 people in the UK use technology to either bank, pay bills, shop or communicate.

- 6 in 10 use technology in leisure activities (61%) or travel (58%).

- 62% now use social networking such as Facebook or Twitter.

- Only 2% of the population say that technology doesn't feature in their lives.

Yet when we asked the public about the different ways in which they used technology in their lives, health and care came in last place.

- Fewer than 1 in 3 (30%) people use technology to support health and care.

Coming behind banking, shopping, communicating, social networking, leisure, travel, work, learning and education – health and care was the area in which the fewest people used technology.

Fewer than

1 in 3 people

use technology to support health and care.

An issue for all generations

Managing health conditions and needing care are often seen primarily as issues associated with ageing.

An easy assumption might be that there is an inverse correlation between needing care and being comfortable using technology.

However, our polling showed that a lack of access to technology to support health and caring counts across the generations.

- 28% of 18-24 year olds use technology for health and care – the same percentage as use it amongst 35-44 year olds and 45-54 year olds.

- A higher percentage, 31%, of both those aged 55-64 and those over 65 said they used technology to support health and care.

- The highest usage (35% of the age group) was amongst 25-34 year olds.

Even the tech-savvy and middle classes aren't getting their hands on technology to help manage their health or support caring.

- 30% of the general population were using technology to support health and care, but this only rose to 32% for Facebook users and 40% of Twitter users.

- Current use of technology in supporting health and care was higher amongst the middle classes (35%) than working class families (25%), but was still only just over a third.

Even the

tech-savvy

and middle classes aren't getting their hands on technology to help manage their health or support caring.

Not now, but in the future?

It is perhaps unsurprising that most people are not using technology to help with health conditions or care needs, as this kind of technology often only gets used when families are hit by a health crisis or someone starts to need care and support.

However our polling showed that low usage of health and care technology isn't simply a case of care and health needs being 'out of sight and out of mind'. Families weren't using the technology now, but even when asked what they would do if caring affected them in the future, few mentioned technology. Hardly any of the respondents named health and care technologies such as telecare, health monitoring and health-related smartphone apps as a top choice on where they would seek support.

We asked where families would look for support if they did need help with caring for an older parent or a disabled loved one.

- Public services were the top choice – the majority (55%) would look to their local council and 39% would think of the NHS.

- Family and friends were a top choice for a third of the public (32%), while 27% would look to the benefits system.

- Around one in ten would expect to buy in care services privately and 7% would think about asking their workplace for support like flexible working.
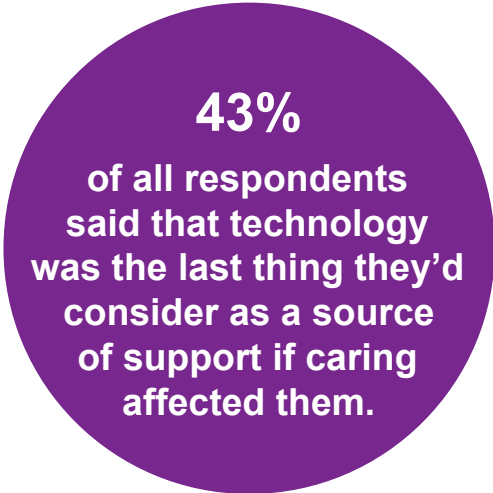
Again, technology came last, with just 4 in every 100 members of the public saying that technology like telecare, health monitoring and smartphone apps would be one of their top choices for help if they needed to provide care and support for a loved one.

- No more than 5% in any age group said they would look to technology as a top choice for support if caring affected them in the future.

- 43% of all respondents said that technology was the last thing they'd consider as a source of support if caring affected them.

With only a minority (30%) of families currently using health and care technology, not many more would consider using technology even if their family were to be affected by poor health or caring.

Even groups which we might expect to be more likely to look to technological solutions would not think about technological support if they were caring. Facebook and Twitter users and those aged 18-34 were just as unlikely to look to care and health technologies if caring affected them in the future.

It seems clear that, despite families' enthusiasm for technology across most other aspects of their life, they simply do not think about how they could use it now or in the future for their own health and care support, or to help them care for an older or disabled loved one.

43%
of all respondents said that technology was the last thing they'd consider as a source of support if caring affected them.

Telecare and other established care and health technologies

Smartphone apps have shown exponential growth in the past five years, as has the number of users of social networks and internet communications software like Skype and Facetime. However, these are relatively new innovations compared to other technologies in health and care. It may be that these technologies have not yet moved beyond social interactions to become fully integrated into all aspects of family life.

Telecare monitoring systems have been used for decades in the UK, and alerts and monitors linked to support services are one of the more familiar forms of health and care technologies. So to what extent has awareness and readiness to use these technologies reached a broader public understanding and acceptance? We asked the public whether they would use telecare – without giving a definition of what it was.

- Only 1 in 8 (12%) of all respondents said they would use telecare, dropping to only 7% of for over-65s.

- Fewer than 1 in 10 (8%) responded that they would not use telecare.

- 80% admitted they weren't sure what telecare was.

The results held across age brackets with small variations amongst older people – with 85% of over 65s saying they weren't sure what telecare was. This was not markedly different from the most aware group, 35-44 year olds, where still 77% of respondents did not know what telecare was.

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Resistance or lack of awareness?

We then defined telecare for respondents, in plain English:

"Telecare is a system of monitors and sensors which can include a basic alarm service, able to respond 24/7, e.g. if someone has a fall. It can include sensors such as motion or fall detectors and fire and gas alarms that trigger an alert to a response center centre staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It can include location devices that can find someone, e.g. if someone with dementia wanders outside the home."
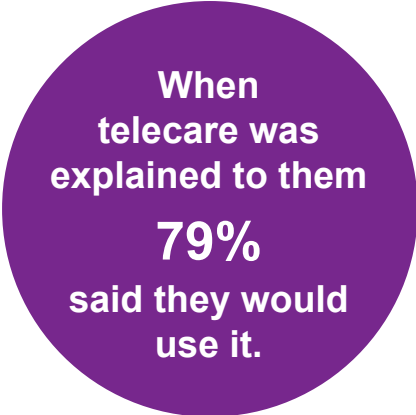
We asked if, knowing what it was, they would consider using it:

- 79% said they would use it (so long as it were affordable), with a third (32%) saying they *definitely* would and 47% saying they *probably* would.

- Only 1 in 8 said they would not consider using it with only 5% (1 in 20) saying they *definitely* would not.

So based on their existing knowledge, only 12% of the population would use telecare but when the term was explained to them this shot up to 79%.

Surprisingly the youngest respondents were least likely, though still very likely, to consider using telecare – with 74% of 18-24s saying they would consider it. However this is also likely to demonstrate that issues of ageing and poor health are less likely to be preying on the minds of younger respondents.

The group most likely to use it were, in fact, the over 65s, with 85% saying they would consider using telecare once it had been defined. This is amongst a group of whom only 7% said they would use telecare when initially asked – the explanation triggered a rise of 78%.

When telecare was explained to them

79%
said they would use it.

Appetite for health and care technology

It is hardly surprising then, that the potential for technology in health and care has not been realised when you consider the level of public awareness:

- Despite heavy usage across the generations of technology in daily life, less than a third of people say they use technology in health and care.

- Most individuals would not consider technology to be an important source of support when caring and of health conditions affected them and their family. In fact, many say it would be the last place they would look.

- Most people have no idea what even established health and care technologies are.

However, when people are informed about what health and care technologies are, the vast majority would consider using the services. Only 1 in 8 say they wouldn't use this kind of support.

This enthusiasm extended well beyond telecare when respondents were given a menu of options on how technology could help:

- Two thirds (65%) said they thought technology would play a bigger role in supporting families to care for older or disabled loved ones.

- Almost two thirds (61%) would use online information and alarms, sensors and health monitoring equipment.

- Almost 6 in 10 would access online services like banking and shopping (58%) or would like to book hospital appointments or organise care services (57%) online.

- Only 3% said they would not use any of the technological options listed to help with caring.

The results also give lie to the myth that older people are Luddites when it comes to technology. Respondents over 65 were more likely than average to say they or their families would use the internet for information and communication, for alarms, monitors and sensors and for online services such as banking and shopping.

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Opportunities and vision

Care and Technology in the 21st Century, a Carers UK report published in 2012 as part of our Future Care series, identified four areas of opportunity for technology to transform both services and families' lives. These have become even more relevant today.

Opportunities for health and care

As health and social care continue to operate under severe financial pressures resulting from steep demographic challenges combined with tough public spending settlements, new technologies can drive productivity, reduce avoidable demand and play a key role in prevention.

Technology must be key to the Government's renewed focus on integration of health and social care roles, transforming and integrating services, streamlining processes and providing information and training.

It has already been shown to deliver significant outcomes for health and care services, helping to substantially reduce mortality, reducing the need for admissions to hospital, lowering the number of bed days spent in hospital and reducing time spent in A&E, with clear gains in terms of service and cost effectiveness.

Opportunities for families and carers

Technology presents huge opportunities for families, particularly as demographic shifts result in childcare, work and eldercare overlapping for greater numbers of families and a rapidly rising number of carers take on more intensive caring responsibilities.

Across the trends in carer demographics, from rapidly rising numbers of older carers, pressured 'sandwich generation' families and even greater numbers juggling work and care, technology can play a vital role in improving access to support and information, giving peace of mind and reducing stress.

We already know that assistive technology can give both carers and the people they care for greater independence and reassurance. Carers UK research in 2013 showed that almost three quarters (72%) of carers using technology said that it had given them greater peace of mind. Over 10% said that using health and care technologies had either helped them to get a job or stay in work alongside caring.

Despite this, we are only now starting to realise the opportunities for practical and online technology to help families to co-ordinate a better work-life-care balance, access peer-to-peer support and save time.

Opportunities for employers

With an estimated 2.3 million people having given up work to care, and a further 3 million having cut their hours, businesses are bearing the costs of a failure to support families to combine caring and work.

Business forum Employers for Carers continues to highlight the costs in staff productivity, absence, absenteeism and workplace stress of families' struggle to combine work and care.

When they reach crisis point and end up having to leave work not only do families often face financial crisis but employers face huge costs in recruitment, retraining and a loss of skills, knowledge and expertise – often from employees at the peak of their careers who suddenly find that ageing parents need support.

Employers should be looking to see how technology can help them to be better employers for the 3 million people who juggle work and caring. Not just through new models of remote-working, but through smartphone apps which tells a staff member that a care worker has arrived on time, co-ordination tools for them to organise care between them and their families, online carer support networks in workplaces or alarms and monitors at home which give carers peace of mind at work.

Opportunities for the economy

With millions giving up work or reducing working hours the economy is paying the price. The earn-back effect of helping families to stay in work could net the Treasury millions in additional tax revenues and reduced spending on benefits and social care.

With rapidly growing demand for health and care services, providers and workers need to work smarter and technology can help deliver for a sector that is being asked to drive up workforce skills, and service efficiency and quality on tightening budgets.

The market for health and care technologies is underdeveloped and remains focused on delivering block contracts for statutory health and care agencies. A stimulated private purchase market which drives consumer purchasing of health and care technologies, alongside increased and more varied use in the public sector, could be amongst the innovations which the Treasury's Plan for Growth identifies as long-term drivers of economic growth for the UK.

Our vision for technology and caring

1. **A step-change in public and professional awareness of health and care technologies** so that use and purchase of technology to support caring becomes a normal part of life and of professional practice.

2. **Cross-Government action to identify and realise the potential of health and care technologies** to support health and wellbeing, business growth and productivity, labour market participation, care workforce development and the sustainability of health and social care services.

3. **A vibrant, accessible health and care technologies market** focused on consumers, which delivers attractive, affordable products and services which reflect how families live and work.

Methodology

Fieldwork was undertaken by YouGov between 26th July and 29th July 2013 as part of an online omnibus survey.

Total sample size was 2069 UK adults aged 18+. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

Carers UK

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