DispATches - March 2018

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March 2018: Work and Pensions Secretary rebuked over Motability claims, engineers urge UK to improve adoption of assistive technology, SmartBox unveils new text communication software for literate users

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Public policy, legislation and campaigns

Work and Pensions Secretary rebuked over Motability claims
The Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey has been accused of making a series of misleading statements to MPs about the Motability scheme. Conservative peer Lord Sterling, who co-founded the scheme in 1977, has pointed out that many of its problems Ms McVey has highlighted stem from her government's policies and the remedial actions that she has taken credit for were in fact taken by the charity itself.

Councils surveyed on telecare services
A team of academics has published the results of a survey of local authority telecare provision for older people in England. Half of council telecare managers disagreed with research evidence suggesting telecare represents poor value for money, citing benefits such as delaying and reducing the need for care and support, enhancing people's quality of life, assisting carers and helping with safeguarding.

Engineers urge UK to improve adoption of assistive technology
The Institution of Mechanical Engineers has called on designers, manufacturers and marketers in the assistive technology sector to pay more attention to the needs, attitudes and capabilities of older people. In a new report the Institution argues that the UK is lagging behind the rest of the world in adopting smart technology for the home and is missing out on an opportunity to save billions in healthcare costs.

Microsoft establishes online exclusive gaming community
In its latest bid to improve accessibility in technology, Microsoft has launched a Gaming for Everyone Hub to unite gamers and game developers in the cause of promoting inclusive practices. The Hub includes a dedicated gaming and disability community section.

Technological developments and innovations

SmartBox unveils new text communication software for literate users
Assistive technology company SmartBox has launched a new software application for literate users that aims to make text communication more intuitive and efficient. Text Talker is designed to help users quickly generate messages in the moment as well as prepare for conversations in advance.

OrCam MyEye helps with reading and identification of people and objects
A company based in New Zealand has created a lightweight camera that speaks aloud to help people with visual impairments or a reading disability such as dyslexia with everyday activities. OrCam MyEye is a wireless, lightweight device that can be magnetically mounted on the user's spectacles or sunglasses frames to help them read text and identify faces, consumer products, colours and bank notes.

Smart control alleviates hand impairments
A collaboration between researchers, students and a care provider in South Australia have created an innovative control system that connects with most mobile smart devices to assist people with reduced dexterity to interact with their environment. Designed for people with cerebral palsy, arthritis and other conditions that result in hand impairment, the eye-boll is an orb-shaped device that can sense movement to allow users to remotely operate household appliances and equipment.

Remote tracking device detects people, objects and locations
A Spanish technology company has created a simple but versatile device that allows users to find people, identify places and track a person's whereabouts via a dedicated smartphone app. Universal Finder One (UFO) is designed to look like an extraterrestrial spacecraft and can be programmed to make noises that signify the presence of objects, people and locations in its vicinity.

Funding news

The Hope Foundation for Children
The Hope Foundation for Children provides funding to improve the lives of children and young people affected by illness, disability or poverty. It offers grants for a wide range of items such as medical equipment, computers, holidays and days out.

Training & events

Workshop on robotics and assistive technologies

Wednesday 21st March

Queen Mary University of London, Mile End
A day of talks and demonstrations of the latest applications of autonomous devices for people with mobility impairments

The Assistive Technology Conference: Empowering Independence

Wednesday 18th April

Adelphi House, University of Salford
A conference dedicated to showcasing how assistive technology can help people live, work and learn more independently.

The Assistive Technology Exhibition and Conference 2018

Thursday 3rd May

ILEC Conference Centre, London
A conference aimed at disability professionals and technologists involved in post-16 education and the workplace

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Comment from Clive, author of dispATches

Telecare is a far more complex technology than most local authorities assume
After a rocky preamble telecare appears to have become an established feature of the social care system.