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Practical guide on 'Using Technology in Dementia Care' published, Amazon Echo adds Show and Tell feature for visually impaired people and WHO launches smartphone app to help aid support to older people

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Public policy, legislation and campaigns

Proposals for digital reform to the courts promote inclusion

A new report commissioned by the government to advise on [digital reforms to the Courts and Tribunals Service](#) has emphasised the importance of ensuring that online court services such as virtual hearings do not disadvantage groups at risk of exclusion, including disabled people.

The Design Council announces Home Innovation Challenge winners

The Design Council has named the winners of its [Home Innovation Challenge](#) which recognised products that help people live at home independently. Among the products that won a share of the £150,000 prize were an easy-change duvet cover, post-surgery underwear and a universal clamp that can be used to temporarily fix things together.

Researchers publish practical guide to technology in dementia care

A team of academics has published a practical guide on ['Using Technology in Dementia Care'](#). The book combines the latest research with practical advice on how to use mainstream and specialist technology at home, outdoors and for fun with people living with dementia.

Think tank argues for inclusive rather than age-specific products

The Centre for Ageing Better's Jemma Moulard has [published a blog](#) arguing that the technology sector's recent interest in targeting products specifically at older people is misguided and would do better to focus on making products more inclusive for everyone.

Technological developments and innovations

Tobii Dynavox releases its latest eye-gaze communication aide

Tobii Dynavox has launched the latest generation of its flagship

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Useful Events



Design for Independence: Developing Assistive Products for Disabled People

Wednesday 27 November

University of Bath

Ross Atkin, researcher, designer and engineer who recently appeared on BBC's The Big Life Fix will be presenting at Designability's free annual event. [Find out more](#)



Cardiff Occupational Therapy Adaptations Conference

Wednesday 4 December

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has a range of new features including a second screen that mirrors the phrases being typed for listeners, the ability to be switched on at a glance and a desktop control tool.

Amazon Echo adds Show and Tell feature for blind and visually impaired people

Amazon has unveiled a [show and tell accessibility feature](#) for the Amazon Echo which allows people with visual impairments to identify grocery items by holding up a food or drinks product in front of Alexa's camera, allowing the device to recognise and say the name of the object.

Dementia device makes it easier to stay in touch with smartphone app

A new version of the MemRabel dementia aid that allows family, friends and carers to set up reminders for users has been released. The [MemRabel 2i](#) comes with a dedicated smartphone app that allows carers to set video, photo or voice reminders remotely.

World Health Organisation produces smartphone app for health and social care professionals

The World Health Organisation has [launched a smartphone app](#) to help health and social care workers to provide better support to older people. The WHO ICOPE handbook app provides practical guidance on a range of health conditions and impairments.

Funding news

The Mobility Trust

[The Mobility Trust](#) provides powered wheelchairs and scooters for UK residents with severe disabilities who cannot access statutory sources of mobility equipment.

Liechwen Hall Hotel, Cardiff

A programme of expert seminars and exhibitors on home adaptations and equipment for disabled people. [Find out more](#)

Assistive Technology Open Day

Wednesday 11 December

University of Sunderland

The University of Sunderland hosts a day of interactive assistive technology workshops for students and practitioners in higher education. [Find out more](#)



The Future for Visual Impairment: embracing science, technology and

Monday 16 December

Francis Crick Institute, London

A mini-symposium exploring technological advances to help with vision loss. [Find out more](#)

Closing comments from Clive

Telecare must not become an excuse to leave carers in the lurch

Families who provide informal care to a loved one are increasingly under the cosh. As public funding for social care has failed to keep up with rising demand for services; relatives and friends have found themselves under mounting pressure to step into the vacuum – a responsibility that has been taken up by an estimated one in ten people in the UK. The human costs of informal care can be as high as the economic ones, requiring carers to sacrifice educational, career and social opportunities while altering the nature of their relationship with the person they are supporting.

Technology might offer one form of respite for both the public purse and carers. Local authorities have long promoted telecare as a way of supporting people to live in their own homes for longer and have co-opted family members in delivering these benefits. However, telecare has proven to be a mixed blessing for families, promising greater independence for both carer and cared-for at the same time as imposing an additional layer of complexity on the duties of often ageing relatives.

Blurring boundaries?

[A newly published study](#) on the involvement of informal carers in local authority telecare provision in England adds to the growing pile of evidence about the impact of assistive technology on the family and friends who form a significant chunk of the country's social care workforce. Part of a

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larger study led by King's College London into the role of telecare in adult social care for older people; the research sought to shed light on the extent to which local social services departments viewed carers as clients in their own right as opposed to mere 'resources' that services could draw upon to facilitate provision.

Staff saw benefits for carers in being able use telecare technology. Twenty-four out of the 27 telecare managers interviewed for the project, along with 84% of respondents to a survey that reached three quarters of English local authorities, believed that such systems helped reduce carer stress by offering greater peace of mind. Some also noted that monitoring devices allowed family members to stay in employment. Twenty-seven per cent of local authorities offered mobile response teams that could look in on service users if an alarm was raised.

Many services appear to have had a rather utilitarian view of carers. While many telecare managers felt that carers were included in telecare assessments, further probing suggests that they were regarded primarily as sources of information and potential participants in the service only in so far as they could assist by monitoring and responding to call-outs. Few reported that they assessed carers in their own right.

Although local authorities routinely employed their own staff to install telecare in people's homes, some were mulling over the possibility of requiring service users and carers to set up the equipment themselves as a way of cutting costs. Seventeen per cent of local authorities surveyed said that they held telecare users and their carers responsible for carrying out maintenance tasks such as changing batteries.

Caring for the carers

There is little doubt that technology has become a key part of informal carers' toolkits. This year's State of Caring report produced by CarersUK reveals that the internet is a valuable resource for carers, with 88% using it as a source of information and 44% going online for support or communication. However, only one-fifth said that they used telecare devices such as remote monitoring systems and even fewer used technology to help manage medication, control their home environment or coordinate care with other members of the person's support network.

What can be done to support carers to benefit from telecare while managing its drawbacks? One priority should be to ensure that carer assessments are carried out on a systematic basis. Under the Care Act 2014, English local authorities must take the needs of carers into account when they set up a package of support for someone who needs care.

The King's College London-led study indicates that this legal duty is too often glossed over in practice, something backed up by the State of Caring survey to which only 27% of carers reported having received an assessment in the last 12 months. As with any type of assistive technology, understanding how telecare might fit with users' needs, wants and aspirations is vital to making sure it is successfully adopted.

Carers should also be offered opportunities to familiarise themselves with telecare products before using them. Local authorities could organise regular demonstration events at which carers can assess the benefits and usability of various devices. Service managers would also do well to engage residents in designing local telecare provision, particularly when it comes to developing service plans and procuring equipment.

Above all, local authorities must resist the temptation to treat carers as if they were adjuncts to their services rather than Individuals with requirements, desires, strengths and vulnerabilities of their own. This should extend not only to the support and training carers are offered as part of telecare packages, but also encompass a range of other types of interventions that address their social, emotional and occupational needs.



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