Advancing Knowledge of Telecare for Independence and Vitality in Later Life: Insights from the AKTIVE project

Richard Farrell-Smith
Tunstall Healthcare (UK) Ltd
Professor Sue Yeandle
Director, CIRCLE
University of Leeds, UK

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Social research within the AKTIVE project

- ‘Everyday life analysis’ of 60 older people
  - Either prone to falls or with memory problems, most over age 75
  - 4-6 home visits by researcher over a period of 6-10 months
- All had been assessed for telecare support
  - Varied equipment in place; telecare ‘upgrades’ made available
- Older person central to the study
  - Any carers or home care workers also included
- Focus on use, perceptions and experiences of telecare
- At each visit other aspects of their life were also discussed
  - Biography, social contacts, health, leisure, preferred activities
- For published findings to date see: www.aktive.org.uk
- Funded by Technology Strategy Board; academic/industry partnership with Tunstall Healthcare, Inventya Ltd & Univs. of Leeds & Oxford
Coping with Change: frail bodies & daily activities in later life
Gary Fry

- **Carrying out personal care activities** vital for feelings of independence/dignity
- **Performing household tasks** helped keep active/in control of home environment
- **Practising hobbies** supported engagement in everyday life & kept frail older people mentally occupied
- **Leaving the home** sustained local engagement & maintained social contacts
- **TC** gave some frail OP confidence to continue these, or reassured their carers they were safe. Different responses to changes in activities linked to frailty could:
  - compromise identity, **leading to resistance**, conflict with carers, rejection of support,
  - gave way to acceptance as familiarity with TC/other support ‘domesticated’ technology
  - meet with **acceptance/adaptation**, as TC /other help made a difference to what they could do
- **Those with time & opportunity to adapt to changes of bodily frailty** were:
  - more likely to accept support to help them manage everyday life and activities
  - less likely to feel upset or disempowered by having care support in place
Complex caring networks

- Involve many people: family, neighbours, friends, care/health workers, cleaners, etc.,
- Are built by / around the older person; often rely on/maintain contacts formed earlier in life
- Networks of ‘weak ties’ support independence, boost resilience, enhance dignity/ control
- Telecare can strengthen these ‘weak ties’, which are vital for social cohesion.

Family-based caring networks

- Traditionally ‘what families do’; co-ordinated by families who identify needs arrange support.
- May involve other help, but family controls choices; rely on ‘strong ties’ and local, supportive family
- Often work better with telecare, especially for people with dementia.
- Some OP have no local family; don’t suit OP wanting to be ‘fully in control’ in later life

Privatised care support networks

- Accessed through the market, sometimes through informal arrangements
- Can be set up without family help or care assessment through a local authority
- Some OP choose to buy technology, equipment or services for needs they have identified
- Relies on financial resources/available goods/services. TC market not yet ready for this
Factors involved when older people are lonely

insights from the AKTIVE everyday life analysis

Common causes of loneliness
- Death of partner
- Personal mobility limitations
- Disconnection from family
- Desire to remain self-sufficient
- Erosion of social contacts
- Stigma of impaired cognitive function
- Fear of embarrassment

How technology can help
- Keeping connected to others
- Remaining active and going out
- Reducing tensions in the family
- Building personal confidence
- Strengthening ‘weak ties’

How it can get in the way
- Causing anxiety thro’ unexpected responses
- Adding to feelings of stigma or embarrassment
- Pressure of something new / strange
- Added feelings of being ‘bothersome’
- Can emphasise ‘being old’
Industry perspectives on applying the learning of the AKTIVE project

- Improving take up
  - Awareness
  - Importance of design
  - Avoid stigmatising features
  - Promote the benefits (new and old)
    - Making the inaccessible accessible
    - Formalising relationships
Industry perspectives on applying the learning of the AKTIVE project

- Improving use
  - Assessment needs to cover the user’s whole life
  - Importance of Design
  - Clear, simple and consistent language
  - Simple but thorough training
    - Expectations of responses and times
    - Testing and potential false alerts
  - Regular training at re-assessments

- This is just the beginning!
Finding out more

With thanks to the AKTIVE Social Research Team:

**Leeds:** Dr Gary Fry, Dr Emma-Reetta Koivunen, Prof. Sue Yeandle

**Oxford:** Dr Emanuela Bianchera and Dr Kate Hamblin

Contact:
Email: s.m.yeandle@leeds.ac.uk
Project website: [www.aktive.org.uk](http://www.aktive.org.uk)
CIRCLE website: [www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/circle](http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/circle)