

Caring for carers: the technology opportunity

Gavin Bashar, Managing Director

One in eight adults in the UK are home carers and every day another 6,000 people take on the responsibility of caring for a loved one; that's more than two million people each year. As the UK marks Carers' Week, Gavin Bashar, Managing Director at Tunstall Healthcare, discusses how technology can help families to provide greater support for those they care for, as well as providing peace of mind.

Technology plays a crucial role in caring for some of the nation's most vulnerable individuals, from those living with dementia and learning disabilities, to people with mental health needs and physical disabilities. New technologies can help to support home carers take on the significant challenges that may come with caring for a family member.

The crucial role of technology

Investment in technology has a multiplier effect in terms of increasing efficiencies such as reducing burdens on carers, empowering individuals and their families to have greater control over their own health and wellbeing and in turn, improving the overall effectiveness of the social care system as a whole.

Technology can ease the pressure both physically and mentally on home carers, and can play a key role in services being delivered in innovative ways, placing citizens and their families at the heart of decision making, and enabling health, housing and care providers to target support where it's needed most.

Telecare is a system of wireless sensors placed around the home, which immediately detect risks such as fires, floods and falls. As soon as a risk is detected by one of the sensors, an alert is sent to a telecare monitoring centre via a central Lifeline home unit using the phone line or mobile network. Experienced operators can then ensure an appropriate response, such as notifying the carer or a neighbour, or calling the emergency services if needed.

Technology like this offers individuals 24/7 person-centred care, and gives carers the reassurance they need to be able to take some well-deserved 'me time', attend to household chores or run a quick errand without feeling anxious or guilty.

For example, systems can be introduced that will wake the carer if the person they care for leaves their bed during the night, and may be at risk of falling or leaving the home alone. Such technology means carers can get a good night's sleep knowing they will be woken if they are needed, rather than trying to listen for events, or make regular checks.

Putting technology in place can help to carers carry on caring, reducing burnout, and preventing or delaying admission to residential care. It can help them to maintain a social life or work away from home, supporting their wellbeing.

It can also help to widen the circle of care, by making it easier for neighbours and family members to be involved, by responding to calls from the monitoring centre to give the carer a break.

Remote health monitoring means carers can support the person they care for's health at home, reducing the need for stressful and expensive hospital visits, and enabling any deterioration in health to be identified and addressed at an early stage.

The next steps

Caring can take a huge toll on the health and wellbeing of the individuals who are carrying out the caring duties. Technology can help to support them and reduce the pressure, improving quality of life for them and the person they care for.

Smart technology can work alongside carers, doing anything from operating music systems and telephones to issuing an alert in the case of a fall, as well as offering a means of connecting to other family members with video calls.

Systems can be tailored to the needs of individuals using them, as well as the support they have around them, and changed over time if needed. A recent independent **study** of telecare showed that it can help to delay a move to residential care by 8.6 months, helping people to remain where they'd like to be for longer.

As we look to the future, such technologies will only advance, offering even greater support and reassurance to carers, and helping people in need of care to have more choice about how and where they live.