

‘Granny tracking’ at home aims to save millions on care bill

Mark Bridge, Technology Correspondent

October 21 2016, 12:01am, The Times



Charities say technology has a role to play but there is a risk that it could make older people more isolated. Photo GETTY IMAGES

Councils are hoping to save tens of millions of pounds a year on social care by fitting “granny-tracker” technology in the homes of elderly people.

The GrandCare system, which is widely used in the US, uses smart home technology to enable family members or carers to follow a person’s movements remotely and check if they have taken their medicine or eaten their lunch.

A British company, Atel, is testing the system in private households and intends to sell it to families who want to help

to keep their relatives out of expensive care homes. It will be available from January for about £2,860 plus a monthly subscription of £30. This compares with average care fees of about £30,000 a year.

Atel said that its phones had “melted” with calls from councils interested in using the system to cut care bills by keeping people in their own homes and reducing the number of visits from district nurses or professional carers.

The technology will be tested by care providers in Lincolnshire in January, and Atel has liaised with the county council, which will look at the results. A spokeswoman for the council said: “The council proactively looks for new ways of helping people stay safe, well and independent in their own home. We’re aware of Atel’s new product and are looking at it with great interest.”

The company said it was also in talks with other councils who are keen to introduce the technology next year.

GrandCare uses a range of sensors, including motion sensors to monitor a person’s movements; contact sensors that can check whether they have opened their medicine cabinet or fridge; and pressure sensors to detect if they are in bed. It can also be hooked up to medical sensors to monitor blood pressure and heart rate. It can send reminders to the homeowner, and alerts to the carer.

Older people’s charities said that the technology had a part to play, given the acute crisis in care funding, but there was a risk that it would leave some people more isolated.

Janet Morrison, of Independent Age, the older people’s charity, said: “This type of technology has a potentially

important role in helping family members support older relatives and ensure their safety, as long as it's always used with express consent from the older person.

“While the technology could be used by councils to help support older people, it would be unacceptable if it were used to reduce in any way their statutory duties under the Care Act or to limit the amount of personal contact that people have. Care is not only about tasks but also about providing warmth and companionship.”

Matthew Warnes, Atel's founder, said that besides the close monitoring the technology provided, carers and family members could use the system to interact with older people more often. “You can do things like programme their favourite music or film to come on, which we've found people really enjoy.”

He added that councils had no choice but to embrace technology. “They haven't got any money left.”

.

2 comments

Aweweasht

A dystopian future where our mothers and fathers, our grandparents are kept in solitary confinement. Have we really reached the point where these expensive, inconvenient people are unworthy of even basic hands-on care?

We are the fifth largest economy in the world, but we treat each older person worse than criminals. It costs nearly £50,000 to keep a criminal in prison for 1 year, a university

of crime, yet it costs £30,000 to keep the person who nurtured us and invested everything in us until we were adults and beyond. Our jails are bursting at the seams because we are happy to bankroll the criminal justice system, but we baulk at looking after our mothers.

AdamD

The people for whom this technology would be used successfully are not the ones who need it. For them something in complete "slave mode" is required. It is hard to see what aspects of daily living would be improved.

The benefit would come from the team of people required to do the monitoring, not the monitoring.

For many people, the installation of this would come too late to prevent a process of decline. It sounds like a wonderful idea, but the practicalities of it make it less useful than you would have imagined. Now a private company is driving it expect advertising and not proper research as to its value. Public money will be thrown at it without proper evaluation.