

Older people discuss how ‘Smart City Nottingham’ could bring benefits to health and wellbeing

Our team, based at University of Nottingham, invited older citizens from Nottingham to discuss how technology and digital devices could benefit health and wellbeing. Participants were also encouraged to share their concerns about the increasing use of computers and the internet in managing things like appointments and patient records. The team are now sharing findings from the study with the public, Nottingham City Council and technology developers to facilitate older people’s views being incorporated in future development.



What is Smart City Nottingham?

Through better use of digital technology across the city, Nottingham City Council aims to improve services and daily life across the city. Initial projects have included transport and energy, which can lead to benefits for health. Many digital devices are available to improve health on a day-to-day basis. Now Smart City Nottingham is keen to investigate how more and more people can benefit from these technologies.

Our aim was to use a research method called ‘Citizens Juries’ to discuss dilemmas within future uses of digital technologies and feed back older people’s perspectives to Smart City Nottingham.

Involving citizens and organisations

The project was promoted widely, including; the council and NHS, charities and community groups. Notifications and a questionnaire were sent out to many organisations (see Box 1) and 70 community groups. Views relating to

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health benefits and concerns over digital technologies were collected.

Box 1. List of organisations and networks used to promote the project to stakeholders:

- Vulnerable Adults Provider Network (Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service)
- Age-Friendly Nottingham Steering Group
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Nottingham City Council
- SelfHelp UK
- Healthwatch

For our first meeting we invited people from groups of more vulnerable older residents such as those from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and those with disabilities, or mental health needs. People who were working or volunteering with these groups were also invited. Thirty four people attended the meeting and diverse discussions took place between technology developers and members of the public. Various expectations and concerns were raised and we noted three dilemmas where potential disadvantages were weighed against the benefits of technology:

Safety monitoring versus concerns of loss of independence

Assistive technology and monitoring in the home may benefit people by offering support and to reassure people of safety. However some people may feel that

monitoring implies ‘keeping tabs’ on them and that this may reduce privacy and independence.



Online services and social networks

Regular but brief contact with people including health and social workers can support people’s wellbeing. There was a concern that if all services move online, that this may lead to an increase in loneliness. On the other hand, digital technology such as video-calling (e.g. Skype) and social media platforms (e.g. Twitter) can be an important source of contact and peer-support, thus reducing loneliness.



Data-sharing and privacy

If someone’s medical information was shared with their social worker then this may avoid duplication of the same questions. On the other hand, there was a concern for privacy; will the individual know and have control over who has access to personal data?

Who is in control?

For some people a priority issue was questioning who was in control of developing digital healthcare. Participants questioned to what extent the public would be involved in the developing plans.

Some of these discussion points were turned into realistic everyday issues by creating stories called “personas”. These are a description of a fictional person, who could be a neighbour or friend. The exercise encouraged participants to imagine the characteristics of this person and how they might react to digital technology.

Literature review

In this section, we studied what other researchers have written about older people’s use of digital health technology (also known as ‘Smart Health’). We included studies of devices that are used within the home to help people maintain their health and independence (assistive technology and telehealth). We are particularly interested in how public views are consulted and involved in the design or implementation of digital solutions.

(The Strategy and Resources team at Nottingham City Council helped us with this review).

Personas

We continued listening to people’s views through attending a coffee morning in the Afro-Caribbean community. We brought these views together with the first public meeting to develop three

“personas”. Personas are a way of telling a story about how an individual may be affected by digital technology and how this may affect their health. These stories can then be used to prompt



Figure 1 This is a persona that we created. Gladys is a made-up person.

discussion within Citizens’ Juries.

Citizens’ Juries

“Citizens’ juries” is a way of prompting members of the public to debate and discuss a specific topic. It provides a research method for understanding how people form opinions on a topic. We convened two sessions, to discuss concerns around Smart Health that had been identified within the previous meetings.

One Jury was composed of older people who had had prior participation in the project’s discussions; the other jury had not previously been engaged in the discussions.

The Juries first discussed the meaning of the term Smart Health. This was a new idea for some people, but most people had views about current technology or

possibilities for future. Then the persona of 'Gladys' was presented (see Figure 1).

The group discussed how Gladys may interact with technology; how various devices may support her to manage long-term conditions or prevent health problems.

Analysis is ongoing, but emerging themes from discussions within the jury sessions include the following:

- Would information about an individual be owned by that person?
- A feeling that data-sharing is inevitable in future.
- One group discussed the political and social context of these issues.

Outputs and future work

We plan to write two academic articles; one focussing on the literature review and one discussing the findings of the citizens' juries. We will share our findings and discuss this work with academics at University of Hertfordshire and University of Bristol with the aim of working with these universities in future. We have discussed with Nottingham City Council plans for two public events in the future where we may take the next steps in involving older people in the development of Smart Health in Nottingham.

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