

**How do older people in receipt of telecare services both utilize and experience these services? Has this changed as a result of Covid-19? What have the effects been on feelings of loneliness and social isolation and how does this link with their use of ICT generally?**

*Professor Barbara Fawcett and Konstantina Karastoyanova, University of Strathclyde  
With the valuable assistance of Ann Murray and Doreen Watson, Technology Enable Care,  
Scotland.*

A photograph showing the back view of a young woman with long brown hair tied back in a ponytail, wearing a tan quilted jacket and blue jeans. She is hugging an older man with white hair from behind. The man is wearing a dark blue sweater over a light-colored collared shirt. They are outdoors, with a blurred background of greenery and a building.

## Participants and Areas

- Older people in receipt of telecare services.
- Three areas within Scotland with the support of HSCP.
- Interviewed over zoom and telephone.

# Key Findings



# Telecare:



- Two main cohorts
- No more frequent use of telecare service during the pandemic
- Most substantial change
- Return to physical visits with the ease of restrictions for sheltered-housing customers generally valued.
- Cease of yearly basis personal information and health status reviews

## Telecare (continue):



- No changes were reported in relation to the monthly tests of the telecare systems.
- Most of the service users in this research described the telecare call handler response to alarm triggers as ‘nice’ and ‘friendly’. However, some said that they felt the responses were short and slightly formal. This suggests that perhaps some telecare users did not view the service as an emergency response but had expectations of a more proactive, befriending role from the service.
- Most customers described the telecare service received as excellent, friendly and supportive and did not raise any further issues.

## Telecare (continue):



- **Telecare more than an emergency response**
- **Future changes to the service and customers' needs**
- **Sheltered housing customers' needs**
- **Cost**

# Use of Technology:

- Majority reported using technology with customers using wide-variety of technology devices.
- Reasons for not using technology.
- No regional pattern of lack of technology use.
- Acquiring technological skills.
- No issues using technology but clear preference for direct human contact.
- Technology helped. however, did not make up for the lack of direct contact and engagement.



## Loneliness and Social Isolation:

- Exacerbated feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- ICT helped and will continue to be used
- Importance of hope and being involved in something, having a purpose (e.g., pets), reciprocity.



# Loneliness and Social Isolation (Cont)

- **Concerns about neighbourliness, in that Covid-19 and the concomitant restrictions were seen to have brought in a new social wariness and a perception that neighbours were not allowed to be neighbourly**
- **Reports that Covid-19 restrictions have become the ‘new normal’ and that they had little time left for a resurgence of community .**
- **Many were also aware of the contradiction between Covid-19 shielding and ‘lock down’ measures being enacted to protect older and ‘vulnerable’ people, whilst at the same time many older people were being left to manage with much reduced or no support. A frequent comment was that they had been forgotten.**
- **Those in sheltered housing appeared to be most affected by prolonged periods of isolation and there appeared to be a push back to older people themselves being left to restart activities such as the ‘community hall’ and community activities.**
- **The less contact with support services an individual had, the less likely they were to contact services and ask for support. Poignant comments included “Loneliness is my trouble”; “Nobody is interested”; “You feel like nobody is there. You are totally alone”; “I feel cut off from people.”**

# Recommendations



**Telecare - emergency service, but seen by customers as valuable means of support. Options:**

- More proactive approach – resource implications
- expand existing collaboration with voluntary and third sector organisations re befriending etc

# Recommendations



**Two distinct groups - sheltered housing group and those in other forms of accommodation.**

- **Sheltered housing respondents most affected – lack of community, connectivity, daily support, insecurity**

**Recommendation, Greater liaison with sheltered housing providers. If sheltered housing support and activities not resumed and insecurity not addressed, there will be a greater reliance on telecare services.**

# Recommendations ICT



- Technology plays a key role in sustaining connectivity and mitigating loneliness and isolation. Older people not “technophobes”
- Need to take account of economic issues, training and internet connectivity
- ICT usage widely valued but the importance of real-life human contact also emphasised.
- Recommendation - mixed technological and face to face responses going forward.

# Recommendations



- **Person-centred approach within telecare services - importance of independence but means different things to different people**
- **Recommendation: Emphasis on providing as tailored a service as possible within resources**

# Recommendations

- **Development of the National Care Service for Scotland - need for greater connectedness between the various services working with the same populations and with telecare services.**
- **Particular emphasis on co-production in the further development of telecare provision and roll out of the NCS**

