

CARE MATTERS Live: AI Sensors & Robots: what next for social care in the UK

Podcast episode transcript (automated)

CARE MATTERS

Hello and welcome to this special edition of the Care Matters podcast, recorded live at the University of Sheffield Students Union and chaired by Dr. Kate Hamblin. This podcast is part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Festival of Social Sciences and is a joint event by the Centre for Care with the Digital Society Network's Digital Inclusion and Ethics Hub. Here, a panel of experts with lived experience discuss A.I. sensors and robots. What's next for social care in the UK?

Kate Hamblin

Hello and welcome to this Festival of Social Sciences event where we explore everything related to care, the care we give each other, but also the support provided through more formalised provision and policy. In the past, the series is included guests who receive and provide care and support, as well as policymakers and experts from across the world. And we've looked at topics such as how care is often invisible and undervalued, but also specific policies or ways of working that could make a difference to people's lives.

This event is also part of the University of Sheffield Digital Society Network, Digital Inclusion and Ethics Hub. I'm really excited about this podcast which is going to look specifically at care and technology will be thinking about the types of devices that are used in care arrangements and relationships, but also increasingly how online digital provision is being used in adult social care services.

Our panellists share their expertise on the reality of technology and care, where they think it might go in the near future. Just to start with a bit of context, technology has been part of care arrangements since, you know, quite some time. If you think about the sort of pendant alarms that have been a core part of a lot of local authority provision since the 1960s, they've been there.

Technology has moved on in the care space. It feels a bit slower. It feels a bit more. And if you think about the advances made in mobile phones, you're not seeing that in the pendant alarm space, perhaps. But in recent years we've definitely seen a policy focus and attempts to accelerate this through funding opportunities, through other incentives, around innovations, around things like robotics and A.I..

And there's a lot of enthusiasm in government. You know, we've seen the Secretary of State for health and social care, Steve Barclay, going to Japan to look at Care robotics. We've recently seen Rishi Sunak's enthusiasm for AI and at the same time we're seeing a move to online services, the digitalisation of care records, the collection of data. This is all happening at pace, but what we really want to talk about today in this session is what this is like in reality for people who receive care and support, people who provide care and support. Where are we with that technology there? So without further ado, I'd like to introduce my panel. So, Katie, to introduce yourself.

Katie Heard

Hi, I'm Katie Heard from Good Things Foundation. We're the UK's leading digital inclusion charity.

Laura Sbaffi

Hi, I'm Laura Sbaffi. I am a senior lecturer at the University of Sheffield, working in health informatics and Social care.

Madeleine Starr

I'm Madeleine Starr and I'm from Carers UK. Carers UK is a national charity which works to make life better for unpaid carers.

Caroline Waugh

Hi, I'm Caroline Waugh I work for the National Co-production Advisory Group. I'm a member of and I work with Think Local Act Personal. I draw on care and support direct payments.

Kate Hamblin

Thank you. And Caroline, you use technology in your everyday life. Just tell us a bit about that, how it came, how you got it, what did you do use it for?

Caroline Waugh

Okay. And I hadn't warned you about this. But it's just occurred to me, always I cycle every day and I use a pedal assist which I suppose is technology isn't it? It works out how much pressure I'm putting on and or how much support to give me. And I suppose the technology I use apart from the phone and computer is I've got a buddy alarm, which is this thing that looks like a Fitbit.

And I used to have the pendant city-wide alarms from the council, but it really didn't work for my it only it only went off if I was next to the receiver box. And so it was so it didn't work. If I was in the garden or on my trike and I just and the base was 40 minutes away from my house.

So it's like falling over. I needed help getting up. I've got to wait 40 minutes. So after falling downstairs six months ago, breaking my arm in four places I got this pretty alarm and I claimed for I used my direct payment, which is given by the council to me to meet my outcomes and, and have an ordinary life and that that you all might experience but that I didn't so it gives me money to meet my outcomes.

So instead of having somebody buddy me and follow me around like a carer 24/7 I had a buddy alarm, which I claim for out of my direct payment, which is money I get from the council, which are keeping a separate account and I have to produce receipts for auditing. So it's all above board. But they let me and I, I hate saying they let me because it was perfectly justified, but I had to research it and put my case.

Kate Hamblin

So that's not something that's typically on the council's sort of menu of technology. It's something you have to.

Caroline Waugh

Yeah. And justify it and, and almost put my case forward for saving money, basically, as if it hadn't have been the strong case and saving money and, you know, buddy alarm of £99 a month, they having a carer coming costing me by £12 an hour and it's a no brainer really. And plus it gave me the independence I need to live a normal life.

Plus I forgot this is it. It's got a GPS So that when I go out on the track in the woods, which I do every day with my dogs, it provides a location to the five people that I've named as contacts on my buddy alarm. So it'll say Caroline's fallen over and in this square location and she needs help it's I think so.

Kate Hamblin

And have you had to actually ever activate it?

Caroline Waugh

Yeah I, I fell over in the porch and it just so happens that my neighbour who is one of my contacts, was taking my dog for a walk on the park behind my house and they received notification and, and came back from any and the GPS even gave the corner of the house. I was, they were following the porch and you know they obviously helped me.

Kate Hamblin

That sounds like a good example of technology but isn't is not quite a robot and it's not quite AI, how would you feel about a 'care robot'.

Caroline Waugh

How would I say I'm quite a kind of personal chatty person And I don't think I don't think I mean, I'm not saying never. I don't think I would quite cut the biscuit for me.

Kate Hamblin

Cut the mustard? I'd rather have a biscuit. Yeah. Fantastic. That's a really great example of but you did very much have to advocate for this yourself.

Caroline Waugh

And I do wonder what would happen if, if the person wasn't capable of thinking, wasn't aware of all these technologies that are available. I mean, would they have been offered like a care a service provider to come and check on them four times a day? And yeah, and taken to the toilet and that sort of thing rather than a buddy alarm.

Kate Hamblin

And maybe this is now time to ask other members of the panel as well about some of those barriers around information and how people find these technologies. I don't know if you would reflect on carers and some of the challenges there.

Madeleine Starr

But I mean, I have to be delighted that Caroline is using buddy because we helped pilot buddy way back then. What was what was so lovely about. But did you want to hold it out? Caroline It's that.

Caroline Waugh

I broke my wrists or my shoulder

Madeleine Starr

It's very. Beautifully designed. Caroline's It looks like a Fitbit. A pendant alarm doesn't look like set that and all. Just a nasty white watch with a big red bit in the middle. That doesn't look like I sit. It looks like it looks like what it is. And one of the really great things about buddy is that it was designed so beautifully, a very deliberately designed so that it was highly functional.

As you say, it can absolutely show where you are, to an eight of an inch. And I learned and it is a very sensitive system. And I'm absolutely with you. Yes. You'd rather have a buddy than have number one

pendant alarm which people find very stigmatising or indeed someone having to come and check on you instead. But the most important is that most people don't know about that.

Most people won't know that buddy exists. We did a piece of research in 2013 10years ago when we ask was about the awareness of the technologies that could support them in their care. It was a YouGov survey, so it was a representative sample and we asked tech savvy people. So they were using them in every area of their lives, sometimes nothing too fancy.

But on the whole they had a they had a mobile phone or smartphone and they were online banking and shopping. They were doing those things. They were all into it. When we asked them if they thought about using those technologies, any technology for caring, they said no. So only three in ten people would think about using that. And that's extraordinary.

These are people who understand about technology and using it. So I think your barrier number one is that people still don't know about these technologies. And we talk about technology as if it's kind of separated out from our normal lives when I'm sure that you are a mobile phone user. Caroline, and that they have a range of technologies that would you, you would use online banking shopping and well, care should just be part and parcel of that part of our lives, a normal part of our technology enabled lives.

And so knowledge is, I think, a huge barrier. And also, you know, we could we but I think it's great actually, to think about A.I. robots. So we we've delivered digital information services for a long time. It's hugely important to us that we can reach people through digital information and try to give people the information up to the earliest possible point we've developed to online platforms, digital platforms that help do that, that can be rolled out by local authorities or by employers.

We created a care coordination app jointly to help connect people who are maybe caring at a distance. So thinking of your family, Laura, in Italy and can help people participate in care, all of those things. Where next? Well, we'll start using live chat, I think, on the website this year to help to enhance our helpline capability. And then we're going to begin thinking about how we can use AI to introduce the kind of chatbot type facility on the website that enables that to answer far more complex questions without having to go anywhere else and ask about what you do that I'm a fan.

So we worked on a pilot with Hampshire County Council on the on the use of a co-bot which is a co-operative robot which it was simply something you strapped on called is an exo-skeleton. But that's ever so false it's you strapped it on and it had had electrical stimulators that came down the back of your legs, so sinister but it wasn't and it enabled a care worker.

Initially they tried it with care workers. It enabled a care worker to pick someone up. So it enhanced their strength. So one person could do a double handed shift in either a care home or inn home care. Well, I mean, that is an absolute no brainer. Was very well received and they actually used it in mainstream frontline services for a while.

And when they tried it with carers. So we did a pilot on the Isle of Wight, nice little distinct pilot area. They loved it, they loved it. And I love this response, Caroline, from one lady who said, 'my God, if that would mean that I didn't have to sit on the floor with my mum for 4 hours while we were waiting for someone to come and pick her up. That's bloody brilliant', she said. 'And I can keep it in my cupboard with the Hoover'. That we are. So I just I think this, I think there's so much potential. I know you're not going to talk about some of the real barriers to people access in technology, but we must not lose sight of the potential as well. You know, Caroline's using it to great purpose.

We know that we can we can really help to reach people early and provide them with information and support digitally. And then there's some ritzy stuff, too, that you know. Wow, why not, I would say if we you know, if we can use these things to help people in their normal lives.

Laura Sbaffi

Well, I agree with you, Madeleine, entirely, that there is so much potential for technologies. And I also agree with the fact that a lot of carers probably are not aware, but there is so much more. I've been working with older unpaid carers and across the board the most common sentiment is apprehension. Well, look at it actually describe these digitisation as the unknown behind the door.

So something they don't know how to navigate, they don't know how to interact with for a number of reasons. First of all, some people just don't like technology. They like the human contact, like to talk to people they like to be on the phone with an actual human being at the other end rather than a recording machine. And some others feel part of this generational gap.

So they see all these young people completely accustom to use all sorts of technologies and they feel like they lost the brain, that they don't belong to this society anymore. They feel left behind. And a lot of them are interested in engaging with technologies. But there is also an element of feeling inadequate. So if someone goes and explain the function of an app to an older person and then the day after they forget, my God, what did they just say?

What was that function? What was I supposed to pull? Short press? They feel kind of, you know, diminished in the sense that they don't want to be abandoned. They don't want to, you know, keep asking people. So they also have this kind of frame in in using these technologies also. Okay. I suppose they have this technology. So suppose they have a laptop or they have a smartphone.

How to download an app, how to make it function, how to update it. So it's the maintenance of these technologies. So they are not necessarily against the use of technologies, which in principle should be very easy to use. And I'm sure what you've been describing is being designed with carers and older people in mind, but there are so many other services and again, discussing with these carers, even the simple, you know, setting up of an appointment and the local GP NHS clinic, it's now happening via mobile phones, so you have to register and you have to fill the online form and then you receive the, you know, the message, the which funnily enough they cannot reply.

So basically they complain. So people are pushing us to use technology, but it's not equitable because we cannot even reply to that message. So what are we left with so these are some of the functioning barriers. And then obviously there is the literacy barrier, the fact that people are not, as I was saying before, they don't feel like they are up to, you know, up to date and even if they want to be, they have their own personal conditions.

Maybe they have cognitive impairments of some kind. So they need constant support, which is not available, unfortunately. Not least definitely. Also the financial problem, because some people I don't know whether these technical supports technologies are free, where everyone, but probably they are not. And a lot of these elderly people are, you know, on a normal state pension. So they sometimes just manage to, you know, be below the threshold for social support.

And those are actually the most isolated people because they don't qualify for financial support. They still need help and they cannot blame anyone or anything. And it's this never-ending cycle of frustration. And yeah, I'm stop here. I have so much more to say. But yeah so I hate to go.

Kate Hamblin

To bring Katie in and the work that Good Things Foundation are doing to mitigate some of these things.

Katie Heard

So I think it's important to put some of this in context. So 10 million people in the UK digitally excluded in some way, shape or form. So that might be they can't afford a device to get connected to the Internet. It might be that on a monthly basis they can't afford their mobile phone data package or their broadband package.

It might be that they have not got the skills or they're scared or they just don't want to be online. So there's been 10 million people. The vast majority of those people are over 65 and lots of younger people, but the vast majority are over 65. And those people that are most likely to be digitally excluded are over 65 people with health conditions or people who are disabled.

So the very people that we want to use these digital products and services to help them manage their care or manage their health are the ones that are least likely to be able to use it. So putting that in context is really important. And over the last 12 months, we've seen this problem getting worse because of the cost of living crisis.

So we see more and put more people cancelling their broadband package, cancelling their mobile phone package, which means they're digitally excluded. And it was great to hear that Caroline had a kind managed to navigate her way to find that kind of the body alarm brilliance. But how did you find that information? Did you look online? Did somebody tell You?

Caroline Waugh

Yeah, I mean, I had the idea that there was something out there. I don't know how, but I have the idea. And my PA, which I which is paid for by the council, he did some research for my me whilst I was there and we decided on the buddy alarm and there was another one as well. I can't remember his name and we decided to put the buddy alarm was more appropriate and, and then she then a way to well you know, got in touch with the when the buddy alarm arrived, she came and set it up for me and it was that was paid for by the council.

But it was only because only because I kind of was aware and I asked for it and I said, can I pay for my direct payment that the council had given me? So otherwise I would have had to pay for it.

Katie Heard

So if you think about how you just find a phone number for somewhere these days, the only way you do that, most of it in this room is by looking on your phone and searching for it. It is very difficult to find a number for anybody to help you in any other way. So if you don't have a mobile phone or you're not online, you can't do that.

And therefore finding out information about the products, services, support that is available to you and allow you to make your own choices about what is right for you is less accessible for you. So we can do all of these amazing things by providing great quality digital information, chat bots, etc. which help a large number of people, but a large number of people are excluded from that.

So one of the things we do at Good Thing foundation is provide free data packages to people who need it, free devices to people who need it, and support people with skills and training and we do that through a network of community partners, so a trusted face to somebody to go and get help. So

your pay would be a prime example of somebody who can help people get online and access the information and the support that they need.

And it's only by building those skills and those that that confidence and regular reinforcement and somebody to ask the stupid questions of, you know, you showed me yesterday, but I can't remember today. Can I ask you again or does a telephone number that you can call to say, I've switched my device cell phone, I don't know how to switch it on or my buddy alarms stop working or doesn't connect to the Internet anymore?

I don't know what I've done. Can you come and help? Is that kind of support that is fundamental part of making this system work and allowing that technology to move on from the really ugly, horrible kind of red on alarms to something that is more attractive, is smarter, can tell you kind of location down to the tiniest GPS point. You know that none of that works unless you have the confidence and the skills to operate in the digital world.

Madeleine Starr

Also fundamentally the infrastructure. Exactly. So, I mean, I think we need to see we need to see these things as a utility. Yeah. And as a public good. Yeah. And it should simply be it's for me, this is a human right. So that kind of access and the support you need to access and use technology that you know, that this should be available.

And there are, as you say, community facilities that that's all that use it. But if we don't crack that infrastructure and fundamental access issue, then all the all the potential melts away because we do know that people are using technology in transformative ways and would not be able to access either the information or the support they receive without them.

So you've got all this, you know, this this rich innovation and all this possibility. And then, you know, if you've got all the really exciting stuff, but you've got to address the infrastructure.

You know, modelling mindsets and those is sometimes they feel they fit in some.

Laura Sbaffi

But also it's all going so fast for a lot of these people it's so difficult even wanting to catch up. We've been discussing the copper line switched off in December 2025. I think, and it's scaring so many people because obviously at that point the standard, you know, the whole telephone won't do anything. They will be disconnected and they will have to engage with a smartphone or some other form of digitised device or a device that they don't have they don't know how to use, they might not afford.

Even if they can afford it, they might be living on their own, going to a shop and being sold something that is completely inappropriate to them. And then even if it's appropriate, it's again, in the maintenance, in the update. the screen is going black. What do I do now? What do I call where do I go?

I know that there are a lot of charities, including Carers UK, Welfare, these, you know, champions. So they they're volunteers who become digital champions. The problem is that it's all based on volunteers and volunteers. Obviously volunteer their own time when they have it and when they have it, they might not be at the exact time when the person is in need of a specific support.

So very a lot of need for proper investments in training opportunities for these people. A lot of them, a lot of those who are willing to engage with technologies, but also to give space to the others who are, you know, a step behind for a number of reasons, because they do want to be engaging, because

they cannot afford to be still provided with the same traditional modes of communicating with each other, communicating with doctors, with the NHS, instead of being pushed into something so quickly on a positive note, and then I let somebody else speak as well. I'm Italian, you know, I carry on for hours.

Madeleine Starr

It's passion!

Laura Sbaffi

Yes. But again, from the words of these carers is not all bleak, even for the digitally excluded, because they a lot of them see this as another revolution. So societies have been through so many revolutions and the digital one is just the latest. So a lot of people say if you can hang in there eventually it will back, it will get better, it will improve.

But in the meantime, we need some extra support to bridge this gap somehow. And you cannot expect that everyone by December 2025, the latest version of a smartphone. What's this all basic information needs that.

Madeleine Starr

But the scandal is that we've known this is coming. Yes. For so long I have done absolutely nothing to fund. A lot of people have done lots of things, including the Good Things Foundation. And you will now is, of course, going. It's just around the corner. It wasn't around the corner.

Caroline Waugh

People didn't like mobile phones at first. And I don't know no one who's not got mobile phone.

Katie Heard

Exactly. We were looking at the data recently about landline usage because we're just interested to see how many people actually didn't ever use a landline because the will only somebody, about 3% of the population didn't have a landline. So no matter how hard we try, we're never going to get everybody to adopt the latest technology, no matter how ubiquitous this is.

So we have to be designing our products, services and systems to provide people with multiple ways to access. Digital's fantastic. It saves services money. And in the current times when you know everybody's budget is stretched, yeah, I can understand moving services online. It makes things more efficient and effective, but it excludes more people. The more you shift. So if it's the only form of access to your product or service, you are losing up to 10 million people. You know, of not being able to access your products and service and if you're a health or care service, that's not right, is it? It's not fair on those people that need you most.

Madeleine Starr

No, I think we need we need those, you know, those multiple routes. But we also need to do something about this And me. Yeah. So we're cutting you know, it's such a such a huge structural issue, isn't it? How do we bring the, the 10 million in and how do we make it as simple as we possibly can? And if we look at it in the longer term in terms of the savings that are made and the essential benefits that investment in bringing the 10 million in a single level bring everyone in, you know, so you will all we still send, you know, publications that by paper and all our membership services are largely online and offline members and we send that Caring magazine in the post.

You have to be able to. Exactly. And that's going to happen for a while until, as Caroline said, there is a shift and you find it's every year almost everyone is using it. But I think, you know, there are some

real kind of fundamental questions to ask about who makes the investment and ensuring that people are included, where that investment sits, who reaps the benefits of the immense savings that can be made if someone's reaping the benefits of the immense savings.

Caroline Waugh

Exactly as is the question I had when, when it was decided that I might save, I don't know, very loose, like £100 a day. So 10 hours a day. So who would benefit from that? Would I get 10 hours a day extra to come in and have somebody give me a massage and read me a bedtime story? You know, would it go back to the service provider portfolio?

Katie Heard

That's exactly where it will go, isn't it? You know, you, you know, because it saves them money. But.

Caroline Waugh

You know, I mean, I, I hate to appear tight, but, you know, maybe it should go to council?

Kate Hamblin

Well, so when you did make the case for the body, is that the sort of thing you have to justify to the council saying, look, it's going to cost me this, but it's going to save you that? So that's the argument you.

Caroline Waugh

Must have to do. I had to say I literally had to have a list of the positives and a list of the negatives. And I think I did a list of the costs as well. So the direct payments manager to say, you know, it's a no brainer.

Kate Hamblin

I think it's really interesting when, you know, all of the legislation is around wellbeing and outcomes and person centred and choice and control, but in reality it's a very prescribed menu, unless you are able to do your research to help you do that research, make the case in the language that the local authority want to see, and then you can have the choice.

Caroline Waugh

Yeah, I had so very much a because I kind of sit on things. Like I said, I know what they're going to ask and what they've got to justify and it's, it's a bit like I swim every week. And direct payments manager was saying, well you should go to the council baths. And I say, well I couldn't because I couldn't cycle that far.

If I joined Virgin, I can actually cycle to the whereas if I joined Graves the council on I would have to get a taxi to there. And so in the end it would end up costing more than joining the private one. So that's how I justify it. So, so I have to kind of feel a bit I feel a bit tired and a bit a bit robbed, but I have to justify, have to really beg for you know, what I'm allowed, what I'm entitled to.

Madeleine Starr

And I think this is, this is such a huge part of the problem. No, we're here talking about some extraordinary potential in terms of technology and innovations that could support people. A new and different way. And at the same time, you know, access to is based on a crumbling system that is underfunded and simply doesn't work very well.

So on the one hand, you we're talking choice and independence and living your best life, and on the other you're asking 40 questions.

To some extent in order to get a very simple piece of assistive technology. So it almost makes no sense. But, you know, there are some real imperatives here because we're going to, you know, we are going to have to have, if you like, to understand how we make some of these advances available and how we embrace some of these advances because we are going to have to work in new and different ways just because of the shift in in population, working age, population numbers of people with need.

And we just you know, we're nowhere near cracking that. I mean, we have been we've been working this for quite a long time and it's of course, there are advances and that's hugely encouraging. But maybe not as many as we would have expected to see by now where there were some fundamentally quite straightforward technologies like, you know fall detectors in environmental monitoring that can really help people live longer in their homes, which we, I think would have expected to see embedded in mainstream services by now with the not there not and we're still talking about actually some pretty basic stuff.

And fundamentally, we're still talking about access to the Internet and helping people to get online. Yeah. So it's you know, it's schizophrenic for it is.

Katie Heard

And I think one of the biggest strides that we've seen in the technology that can help people manage their care at home devices like smart speakers. So many families have now bought smart speakers for their homes and for the people, their loved ones that live on their own. And as we all saw on the I think was Amazon Alexa advert with the blind lady. I think she was using the device to tell her what the weather was like and you know, help her kind of sets out her day. I think there is real potential in those devices that are sitting in everybody's home. But there is a lot of worry about for many people about what that is monitoring or what that is doing in your home.

So there is a real fear. Many people that digitally excluded about the safety and the security of their information and their data, and if they open themselves up to that online world, what does that mean for them in terms of losing their ownership of them and potentially being scammed, etc., etc.? When the landline system gets switched off? Who are all those scammers on?

How are all those scammers going to get in touch with the people that they're already trying to contact through the landline mechanism? So they are going to need to move on to something else. So we're going to have to think about whether the smart speaker is another route into somebody's home or whether they might be able to do that.

But the potential of having emergency response in every room in the house where you shout out the name of your device and say, call for help, and it can contact somebody who will come and get you. That is a phenomenal leap forward. But not every home has it. Does every care home have it in every single room? You know, that would be a simple technology that could provide access to lots of other things as well as that emergency support. So now thinking about that is really important.

Laura Sbaffi

Yeah, but that fear of, you know, regarding safety and not knowing what happens to your information, your data, that's something that emerges time and time with carers because nowadays everything you apply for a service, you buy a product, everything involves providing all sorts of information. We are carers also commenting on the amount of cameras around face monitoring everything and everyone.

What happens to that information? They are really terrified by scams to the point that even that they withdraw from genuine offers, fearing that those are scams and so they miss out on all services because they, they don't want to be the victims of something illicit. And what Caroline was saying is exactly also something else that transpires for everything.

Everything is so difficult to obtain. Everything needs to be justified. Questions after questions. And a lot of them are probably relevant to the actual use of a product or service, and it's another barrier. So if we are dealing with some people who have mental conditions, disabilities and each of the parents having to go through something so complicated, particularly if you are on your own, is daunting and some people just give up without even trying.

And that is something as that who is responsible for this? Developers, the government and things should be just made simpler. So at least like you said, we will never have everyone on board. It's just not possible. But there are so many groups within the spend millions that can be helped in so many ways. And we, like you said, are not doing enough. We are not doing anything.

Kate Hamblin

I think that takes me to a nice point to actually come to each of you and ask- Magic wand time, What's the one change you would you would advocate to enable technologies to be really life enhancing in the world of social care. So maybe I'll start with Katie.

Katie Heard

What I would really like is for the stuff that we have to work well, you know, so any of the devices that many of us take for granted, actually, we open up to everybody who could benefit from them when we provide them with the training and the support to have access to the things that they need.

And a smartphone is a huge amount of power in the palm of your hand processing power that we never even imagined 50 years ago. That kind of technology in your hand. So the power is there for us to do something really amazing with that. I think what I would also like to say is that we put ownership of people's information about their health in the hands of the people who it's about, so that we start to see them understanding their condition better and then being able to share that information with the people that need it to be able to help them make the right decisions about them.

So that fear about sharing information about myself is much reduced. And you're able to say, you've seen that now I'm going to shut down your access, you don't need it anymore. Now I've finished dealing with you, but I'm going to open it up. Somebody else who could really benefit from seeing that data and work out how they can help me. So they're improvements I'd like to see.

Laura Sbaffi

Laura. I first of all agree completely with Katie. I'm going a bit on the technical. So we're discussing AI and I with other colleagues from the university. I work on natural language processing and I've been working also with minority groups in Sheffield. One of the barriers they found apart from digital literacy in general, but also the language barriers.

And obviously I also have an accent and I firsthand experience that you talk to a machine online on the phone, they don't recognise your accent. You are they're repeating the same thing over and over and they come up with the completely different option and it's again, frustrating, humiliating. And so this natural language processing is just this subcategory of AI which is used to, you know, basically to process, analyse speech and those also written text.

And if the training datasets would be more comprehensive to understand, recognise accents, it will be obviously more inclusive for patients, for people in general, but also I think save a lot of money to the NHS, to the actual health care system in general, because basically this system will start storing relevant information, they will start basically interpreting relevant information and again, considering how, you know, desperate, the situation, the financial situation of the NHS is, this could be something to look for done my pitch.

Madeleine Starr

If I just let you know, Laura, that my husband is from Yorkshire and it doesn't understand him, I just need to let you know that that so it doesn't understand regional accents either. I'm with Katie. I want what we have to work because actually we have an absolute wealth and stuff and that is from the simplest of technologies to the most complex, including in a complex I, including robotics, where it works well, I just, you know, I think we have we got a lot of stuff, a lot of investment has gone into development.

We never, ever mainstream anything. You know, we suffer from pilot after pilot after Pathfinder, Trailblazer, whatever we want to call them. And it never you know, we do we don't stick at it. We don't we don't enable it to scale and we don't make it accessible. So there's something about making it all work. And then there's something for me about curation.

We have to let people know what they can have and we don't. And that needs to be a mainstream service and it needs to be provided. I mean, it's so interesting in the sense we did a series of focus groups to follow up that famous 2013 study which found that no one really understood Care technologies. And in the group, when you told them about things like falls detectors, they were, my God, you know, people looking after, sadly, to see frail parents.

You didn't know you could have a buddy. Caroline, didn't know you could have that fabulous stuff. So that was that was actually really exciting. But when we asked where they would want to find out about these things, what do you think they said? They said, I want to find out from my GP because that's where I go. Now. That makes us, of course, all despair, because it's incredibly hard actually making your GP tell you anything, however. So we've got to have that in the system. Somebody knows about it and someone can curate. They can tell people what might help and what's available. And I'm with you, Katie, The power of the smartphone. my gosh, we didn't ever think we would have that.

And then some of the extraordinary developments we're seeing have to be made accessible. We have to tell people about them and help them to understand it.

Kate Hamblin

Caroline, I'm going to give you the final word and the final magic wand. If you could wish for any change that would enable people to have technologies enhance their lives, what would you think is the key thing?

Caroline Waugh

Well, I know this isn't really, it is technology, but it's as if people could have a PA to come in and show them how to do it and like human language and be an actual person come in to their home and say, You want to press this button, this button in order to get a speaker to listen to you, and also the confidentiality of it all. Because, really weird, yesterday I was on the phone to my friend and I was talking about and when I used to go, when I went canoeing once and, you know, and I haven't been there since, but I was just talking about it and, and the next thing I've got loads of canoeing,

adventure holidays on the way. I'm on my Facebook and I was just like, this is so weird. And I do wonder what who's listening.

Kate Hamblin

Yeah. Nice. Thank you. I think that's that the trust is a really big one but also people think would be a really big takeaway that often when we focus too much on the whizzy bits of kit, we forget about the importance of people. You know, these whizzy bits of kit are supposed to be connecting us to people, but they also need people to make them actually work and care.

And I think that's a really nice way to round off and close the podcast. And thank you all so much for your fabulous discussion.

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