

**ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA (TASMANIA) AND TUNSTALL HEALTH LAUNCH  
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA  
GLENN REES, CEO, ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA**

The credibility of Alzheimer's Australia as a consumer organisation depends on the strength of its State and Territory member organisations. AA Tasmania, while not resourced as well as many, can be relied upon to be at the forefront of innovation and new developments.

So it is a particular pleasure to be here today and no surprise that they have entered a partnership with Tunstall Health Care.

Alzheimer's Australia, as a consumer organisation with a focus on consumer directed care, takes the view that technology is part of improving care and increasing choice for people with dementia and their carers.

Every person with dementia has a unique journey. But for all, there come changes in capacity, sometimes from day to day and sometimes within the same day. These changes need to be sensitively responded to.

For people with dementia and for carers, it is important to continue to live as normal a life as possible and to achieve independent living goals. Stigma and social isolation have made it difficult to get the message across that life does not stop with a diagnosis of dementia, even if it will never be the same.

Assistive technologies can play a role in enabling people to enjoy a better quality of life.

In talking to you today, I should like to focus on:

- The importance of providing people with dementia and their carers with good information.
- Ensuring that assistive technology is incorporated into care plans.
- The concerns we should be aware of in use of assistive technologies.

### **Information**

What are assistive technologies? They are simply devices that help people do things they otherwise might only do with difficulty or not be able to do at all. A few examples are walking sticks, wheelchairs, hand rails, ramps and buzzers to call for help.

Assistive technologies also include more sophisticated devices, such as movement sensors to light halls at night, falls monitors that alerts someone that the wearer has fallen and safe walking devices.

So the first task of consumer organisation is to assist in demystifying the term assistive technologies, which might suggest high tech, complex gadgets that require specialist management.

Seeing and touching is believing. So it is not just a matter of supplying help sheets and factual material, but being able to demonstrate what it is that the wide range of assistive technologies may be able to contribute to the care and quality of life of the person with dementia.

Tunstall Health Care Australasia to their credit have been at the forefront in some of these developments. The SMART house in Sydney is a joint initiative between Baptist Community Services and Tunstall. People can go and see a range of assistive technologies in a home setting that promote a person's independence in their own home. The range of devices include passive infrared detectors, a door entry system, bed and chair sensors, electric curtain and blind openers, central locking and an emergency monitoring system.

Another centre in South Australia this time, is the result of a partnership between Tunstall Health Care and Doctor's Safety Line. It showcases available assistive technology through hands on education, training, and facilities that allow visitors to try out live alarms and sensors and to experience the response. Visitors can see and touch all of the technologies and learn how they can be used in everyday life.

I am delighted that in Tasmania, Tunstall have chosen to work with Alzheimer's Australia Tasmania and I hope they will be able to do so in other places.

[A paragraph on the work of AA WA]

[Anne to supply a paragraph on Independent Living Centres]

## **Care Planning**

Assistive technologies are just one consideration in the formulation of person-centred care and management plans that should take into account every aspect of the person's life, including their needs, goals, desires, and capabilities, as well as their living arrangements, whether they be living alone; living with families or carers; or living in assisted residential care. The choice and use of assistive technologies should be guided by the uniqueness of each individual's situation.

For those people who wish to remain in their own homes, assistive technologies can help them to do so through minimising their risks of harm and allowing them to be monitored by external health care professionals, family and carers. And for those living with their families, assistive technologies can have a considerable effect in all of their lives by reducing some of the burden and anxiety of caring. It's a comfort to know that there are mechanisms in place that will help to keep the person with dementia safe or that will alert you to problems when you're in the shower or asleep, and so on.

In fact, the concerns that carers can have about keeping their loved one safe can be so great that carers can end up restricting the freedom of the person with dementia, or deciding that their loved one can no longer be cared for at home.

Assistive technologies can help people to Age in Place, that is, to remain in the same place as their needs change rather than having to move to new and unfamiliar facilities where staff and residents are strangers. Familiar daily rituals can be preserved in familiar surroundings whilst changing needs are accommodated.

Residential care facilities must address the challenges of protecting their residents from harm whilst providing as home-like an environment as possible and respecting residents' rights. Assistive technologies can help to achieve these aims by helping residents to retain independence and freedom.

The principles of doing the best for the person, avoiding harm, and respecting rights and preferences should be guiding factors in the use of assistive technologies and, as part of a personalised care plan, the use of assistive technologies should be governed by protocols and be subject to regular review so that they may be modified to meet changing needs. As with every other aspect of the care plan, the person with dementia and the rest of the care team should be involved in the decisions about the use of assistive technologies.

## **Concerns**

Some people have concerns about the use of assistive technologies. These concerns are that assistive technologies:

- Will lead to people with dementia receiving less care and human contact than they would otherwise;
- Assistive technologies will be used to cut back services;
- That some assistive technologies, especially safe walking technologies, will lead to a loss of liberty, infringe upon privacy, increased vulnerability and compromise individuality.

Assistive technologies are not, and should never be, a substitute for proper care, nor should they in any way compromise anyone. They are designed to enhance freedom and independence and, rather than replacing human contact, may be the key to facilitating it as the person with dementia might be able to move around more easily and visit others when they had previously been limited in doing so.

Assistive technologies can only be part of the options available for enhancing the quality for people with dementia and their carers. I doubt anyone would argue that people with dementia shouldn't have hand rails because that would put them at risk of receiving less care or compromise them in some way. Technological devices of various kinds should be viewed in the same way. Just as medication is only part of a person's care plan, so too is assistive technology.

An like medication, assistive technology should receive careful ongoing evaluation to ensure that they are appropriately meet the needs and desires of people with dementia and carers. Their role is to enable, not to limit.

Assistive technology can also aid carers and help to reduce their anxiety and burden of care, which in turn would help the person with dementia. For many carers, it will not be possible to be with the person they care for every minute of the day, and if assistive technology can help keep the person with dementia safe, then that will be an evident relief to the carer.

## **Conclusion**

The key to the best use of assistive technologies is to have their use embedded within the individual's personalised care plan. In doing so, it is important to ensure that the use of the technology is acceptable to the person with dementia and their carer and supports the goals that they have set for independent living. It promotes a range of realistic choices.

So as I said at the outset, Alzheimer's Australia supports the use of assistive technologies provided that the consumer is fully informed and that it is part of the overall care plan for the individual. In doing so, there is the need for ethical frameworks that ensure that the use of assistive technology is the choice of the individual and subject to regular review and modified to meet changing needs.