

Creative app for dementia careworkers

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Dementia App.

Dementia is an ageing-related condition affecting mental acuity and memory. Incidence doubles in a population for every five years over the age of 65 years, so that almost one fifth of those living to 85 can expect to have the condition and a third of those over the age of 95 will likely be affected. As the population ages through better nutrition and healthcare, we can expect absolute numbers of people with dementia to continue to rise.

Now, Konstantinos Zachos of City University London and colleagues there and at the Registered Nursing Home Association in Birmingham and London company MediaTel Ltd have developed a software application, an "app", for use by staff in residential care homes. The app invokes a set of computational services to undertake creative work, the results of which are presented to encourage and support cognitive creativity by staff with the people in their care. The "Carer" app can be used on an iOS device, such as an Apple iPhone or iPad, with minimum user training required and little management overhead. They describe details in the *International Journal of Creative Computing* this month.

Care staff describe new situations that they

encounter and cases of good care practice in unrestricted natural language and the app retrieves the appropriate descriptions of good care practices from its database. In parallel it generates appropriate prompts for creative activities that might be used to engage the patient. The researchers highlight an application of the Carer app in the case of an uncooperative and aggressive resident. The app categorises and records details of any specific incident as described by the care worker and offers suggestions such as prompts on how to give such a patient reassurance and understanding and to encourage the care worker not to take personally the patient's behaviour, for instance. The app will also offer help to understand reasons for verbal abuse from a patient, for example, and help the care worker understand the situation from the perspective of the resident. Moreover, the care worker can record successes or additional problems and so build up additional information that can be shared with the app's other users in the care home perhaps generalizing specific approaches to all new residents if appropriate.

The team explains that the app "was designed so that care staff can generate contributions to resident care plans that are novel and hence individualised to the resident as part of a shift towards more person-centred care." The researchers point out that the app might be adapted to other related applications in childcare, teaching and criminal rehabilitation. "The app is currently being trialled in residential homes across the UK," explains Zachos. "In each home, shifts of typically 7–8 care staff have been provided with the app to record resident observations in digital form over periods of 4 to 7 weeks."

More information: Konstantinos Zachos et al. Digital creativity in dementia care support, *Int. J. Creative Computing*, 2013, 1, 35-56.

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