Chapter 6
Integrated eCare in Dementia:
The Irish Experience in the INDEPENDENT Project

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the evaluation of the INDEPENDENT project as it was implemented in Ireland. The project in Ireland consisted of the collaboration of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, a not-for-profit organization providing services for people with dementia and their family carers, and Tunstall Emergency Response (TER), a commercial telecare provider organization. A joint client database was developed that provided information on alerts and events generated by the telecare system to ASI staff. An evaluation was undertaken with family carers, staff, and key stakeholders in ASI and TER. The telecare packages were given a high satisfaction rating by family carers. The Web portal was seen as beneficial by staff, in that it provided close-to-real time access to information on telecare alerts and events that could enhance care planning. However, staff regarded the portal as difficult to navigate and use. Key informants in ASI and TER both viewed the Web portal as enhancing the reputation of their organization.

INTRODUCTION

Telecare and Dementia

Dementia has been defined as '…an acquired and persistent impairment of intellectual faculties, affecting several cognitive domains, that is sufficiently severe to impair competence in daily living, occupation or social interaction' (Grabowski & Damasio, 1997). It is estimated that approximately 42,000 people in Ireland are likely to have dementia (Cahill, O'Shea & Pierce, 2012). There are an estimated 50,000 carers in Ireland looking after someone with one of six specified symptoms of dementia (O'Shea, 2000; O'Shea, 2007).

Current health and social policy in Ireland is to provide support so that people with dementia can live in their own homes for as long as possible (Jones, 2004) and many people with dementia want to live at home and manage daily tasks themselves. Family carers are essential in facilitating someone with dementia to stay in their own home. In this context, the aim of telecare is to support people with dementia and their family carers in living at home, safely and securely, for as long as possible.

Telecare involves the installation of sensors in the home in order to monitor and detect risk situations with a view to facilitating the independence and safety of the person with dementia, as well as providing reassurance for the informal carer. The sensors are linked to a monitoring centre that alerts the relevant parties (for example, informal carers or emergency services) when a risk situation is detected, who then make the appropriate response (for example call to the house to check on the person). Sensors may include those that monitor environmental risks (such as fire or flooding) as well as for movement and activity detection (for example, leaving the house at inappropriate times, or relevant patterns of movement/activity within the home). In some cases, alerts may be sent directly to the carer via a pager or as an SMS to a mobile phone.

The INDEPENDENT Project in Ireland

The INDEPENDENT project in Ireland consisted of the collaboration of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI), a not-for-profit organization providing services for people with dementia and their family carers, and Tunstall Emergency Response (TER), a commercial telecare provider organization. Before the INDEPENDENT project, communication between these two organizations was restricted to occasional provision by TER of paper reports on telecare events to ASI Service Managers and Care Co-ordinators. The INDEPENDENT project enabled close-to-real-time provision of client-related information on patterns of telecare events. Figure 1 summarizes the service delivery process in the INDEPENDENT

Figure 1. Illustration of the localized pilot implementation in Dublin
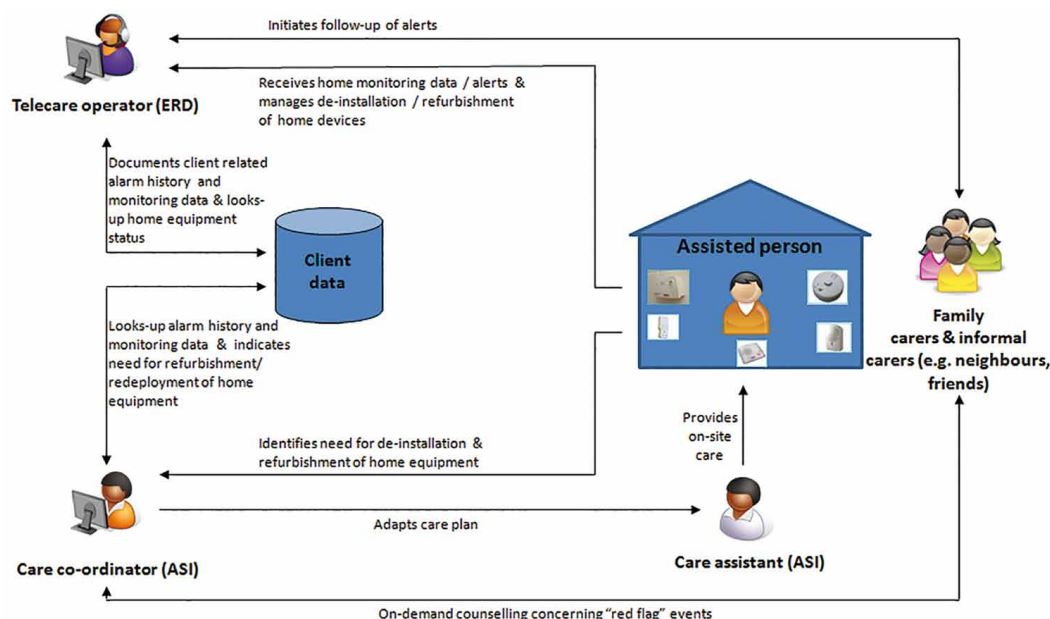
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