

# AGING HORIZONS BULLETIN

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## **Interview: The Trouble with Telecare**

*As the population ages, governments and industries argue that telecare technologies, such as alarms and sensors, can reduce health costs and enable individuals to remain in their homes for longer.*

*But new research from Europe warns that home-based monitoring systems leave much to be desired.*

*Over a three-year period, researchers in England, Spain, Netherlands and Norway studied telecare and how it affects the lives of older people living at home.*

*The researchers talked to older adults in their homes. They interviewed telecare providers and operators, nurses, social workers and engineers who install telecare devices in people's homes. And they convened a series of citizens' panels of older people and carers to discuss different telecare solutions.*

*The study findings appeared in the *Sociology of Health & Illness* on October 25, 2012.*

*The project was co-ordinated by Maggie Mort from Lancaster University, Lancaster, Lancashire, U.K.*

*AHB reached Dr. Mort at Lancaster University.*

**Ruth Dempsey: With shrinking healthcare budgets, some worry telecare technologies could replace personal care and become coercive?**

**Maggie Mort:** Actually, that concern emerged from the research *Ethical Frameworks for Telecare Technologies for Older People at Home* (The EFORTT project).

We began from the observation that huge investments were being made in home telecare technologies without sufficient consideration of their social and ethical implications. Many initiatives are industry-driven and most research we could find was largely uncritical.

We wanted to see how the systems worked in real settings: inside older people's homes. And we wanted to discuss the possible role of technology in helping older people stay independent.

**RD: The research highlights the many different ways people live with telecare. One physically-active wheelchair user touted the pendant alarm . . .**

**MM:** Yes, this U.K. respondent, "Julie," talked about how her pendant alarm gave her the confidence to do things she wouldn't otherwise have risked trying.

Julie is an active member of her local Older Peoples' Forum and also volunteers at a local dementia centre. She uses a pendant alarm system while she is at home and told us that she felt safer about attempting physical actions because she could press the alarm if something went wrong.

Julie told us that, in the nine years she's had the system, no one had ever asked her about the role it plays in her daily life. She said she would like to be able to go out into the garden with the alarm and even use it at friends' homes, since it only works inside her own house.

**RD: Another participant used the pendant only on certain occasions.**

**MM:** This is an example of how a number of older people associate wearing a pendant not with independence, but with weakness, illness and vulnerability.

So these users would accept the system, often mainly to please relatives, but wear the pendant only occasionally when they were doing something a bit "risky." Marta talked about deliberately putting it on when she needed to use the stepladder in her flat.

**RD: Others rejected the system altogether, or asked to have it removed shortly after installation. Why is that?**

**MM:** We found that many devices were "prescribed" but were never used. They were too complicated, poorly functioning or simply not wanted.

The falls monitor, which is worn around the waist was particularly unpopular. It often triggered false alarms, which caused distress and inconvenience.

"Mary's" fall monitor was kept on the mantelpiece. Her most pressing needs were for pain relief and for company. The falls monitor offered help on neither front.

We found that the bed monitor (a flat device placed under the mattress) was also notoriously troublesome. These devices would be installed as part of a package, additional to the pendant alarm.

But many older people and their relatives did not fully understand how they worked, and there was scant evidence of follow up from the system providers.

**RD: Telecare providers wanted the system to be used as prescribed. They were particularly concerned about older adults using devices to strike up a conversation with operators. What happened in these cases?**

**MM:** There were many stories about this. Typically, older people who were lonely would use the pendant alarm or other automated devices (where if no movement is detected a call is triggered from the telecare centre) to engineer a conversation. We thought this was actually rather ingenious. They didn't want to bother relatives or carers but to chat.

But, "just" having a chat is not what the systems are designed to provide. Such behaviour is even termed *misuse* by some service providers.

However, the call centre operators mostly understood the importance of this kind of contact. They gradually built up a relationship with these callers and offered a form of care which was not formally recognized as part of their job.

**RD: I was surprised to learn telecare installers received little training.**

**MM:** So were we. While the systems are relatively simple to install, the social aspects of the work are often very challenging.

So the installers might arrive at a person's house and be told they system is not wanted after all, either because the resident had forgotten agreeing to it, or they had agreed to please others.

Or, installers might find that what has been recommended is actually not suitable because of domestic or family arrangements, or even for technical reasons.

**RD:** Meanwhile, glossy brochures and company websites tout telecare as a universal solution: "the path to personal security and peace of mind". But the findings indicate "one size does not fit all." What needs to be done?

**MM:** Our work with older citizens' panels indicated that older people want to be involved in the design of telecare systems. In fact, they have great ideas for developments and improvements, but they are often excluded from participating in design practices.

We have recommended a process of ongoing engagement where service providers and telecare developers involve groups of older people more closely in the design of telecare technologies.

Secondly, when a telecare system is installed, it shouldn't be seen as the one-off installation of a fixed system but rather a system that is open to evolution. In other words, feedback loops should be built into the installation and implementation process so older adults are engaged and creative users of telecare.

Thirdly, there is a need for more flexible systems so older people can use them for "social" reasons, rather than the present care dominated usage.

*Editor's note: Researchers have created a five-page booklet that will help you decide whether telecare is right for you. This handy resource is peppered with quotes from older adults on their experiences with a range of devices. To download it, just visit [EFORTT](#) and click on publications.*

## Study: Grandmothers Leave a Legacy

Anne Quéniart and Michèle Charpentier from the Université du Québec à Montréal (Montreal, Canada) talked to 25 female francophone Quebecers about the legacy they wanted to leave to their grandchildren.

Participants came from different social and educational backgrounds, and they ranged from 65 to 98 years of age.

Researchers found the women wanted to transmit a mixture of skills and values to the next generation including:

- practical skills;
- life values; and
- family stories.

The findings appeared online in the *Journal of Women & Aging* on November 30, 2012.

### Legacy of practical skills

Most women spoke about teaching their grandchildren cooking skills, such as baking colourful cookies. They also mentioned helping them to make every-day meals to cook for themselves.

"For me, it's about food," said one 65-year-old woman. "My grandson climbs up on a chair and beats the cake batter. It flies everywhere, but I don't say anything."

Others talked about sharing family recipes or transmitting culinary traditions linked to the holidays. How to make Christmas doughnuts, for example.

One participant recalled happy memories of cooking and laughing with her mother and of days with the family at the sugar shack.

The study found some granddaughters wanted to learn how to sew, knit or embroider. Although this was mentioned less often than cooking.

"'V', was the only one who asked me [to teach] her to knit and sew," one 76-year-old woman remarked.

## Legacy of life values

In addition to practical skills, women talked about the values that had shaped their lives, such as respect, honesty and integrity. They, in turn, wanted to transmit these values to their grandchildren.

For example, one participant educated her children to "be respectful" in their dealings with others. She urged her daughters to do the same with their children. This notion of respect, which was crucial for many of the women, extended to respect for oneself and one's physical and psychological integrity.

The women also stressed the importance of perseverance and hard work.

"Honesty, frankness and work: you earn your living by the sweat of your brow. You don't expect others to do things for you. We're all workers," one woman said. "We get up and work."

Other women were more focused on transmitting a sense of openness to others so that their grandchildren would become critically engaged as citizens.

"Having an open mind means being interested in what is happening in society, being committed in at least a small way and having at least some critical sense," one 71-year-old woman said. "I tried to develop it in him [grandson] and I think I was pretty successful."

Meanwhile, "Pierrette", 73, urged her granddaughters to get a good education. "I tell them that girls have to be independent. They must not wait for a man or depend on a man like we did."

"Get an education so you can earn a good living," she tells them. "After that you can have children."

Finally, some women said they wanted to transmit their "love of life" to their grandchildren, whether in simple things like laughter or in the form of cherished pastimes like dance, music or a love of reading.

"If you dance, you can't be angry," observed "Rita" 81. "The music carries you away and you just love life. I still dance."

## Legacy of memories

Stories connect us to our roots. So, not surprisingly, several participants recalled happy times spent telling their grandchildren family stories.

As "Denise," 85, explained:

I like to tell stories and they like to listen [my grandchildren]. I remember that my father always liked to tell stories. My father was born at the turn of the century in 1900, so that's going back a long way, and he would talk to us about his grandfather.

One participant was typing family stories on a computer to leave to her descendants.

Finally, some women tried to keep family memories alive by bequeathing their treasured objects. For instance, one participant had recently given her granddaughter a much-loved watch.

## The fate of legacies

Transmission is a two-way street, however. Grandparents may wish to transmit not just cherished items, but also certain tastes and attitudes. Yet, grandchildren accept only parts of the legacy they wish to carry forward.

In the study, this was particularly evident when it came to transmitting faith and values. Some older women who placed great importance on faith and religious values, especially Catholic ones, noted their grandchildren's lack of interest in religion.

"It's difficult to interfere when it comes to religion," one 80-year-old woman said. "I was told never to discuss religion with the children."

## The last gift

According to researchers, these grandparents viewed the transmission of a legacy as an important task.

Women wanted to:

- help their grandchildren develop practical skills;
- foster an appreciation of their family roots; and
- enable them to define their own futures.

Above all, they wanted to offer subsequent generations personal guidelines and values: "We transmit who we are and what we know," they said.

### **Interview: The Art of Self-Cultivation**

*New figures show that Japan's aging population has skyrocketed, while birthrates have plummeted.*

*Recently, the Japanese finance minister said that the elderly should be allowed to "hurry up and die" to relieve pressure on the state to pay for their care. The minister, Taro Aso (also deputy prime minister) later apologized for his "inappropriate" remarks.*

*Such ageist rhetoric is contrary to Japan's tradition of respect for elders, which Ronald Nakasone illuminated in this interview first published in AHB January/February 2010.*

*The interview expanded on the author's essay in Generations (Vol. XXX11, No. 2, 2008), where he described growing old in Asian cultures as an adventure of learning and mentoring.*

*Nakasone is professor of Buddhist art and culture at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.*

AHB reached Dr. Nakasone in Berkeley.

At fifteen I set my heart to learning.  
At thirty I took my stand.  
At forty I was without doubt.  
At fifty I understood the way to Heaven.  
At sixty my ear was attuned [to Heaven's ways].

At seventy I followed my heart-mind desires without transgressing the way [of heaven]. – *Confucius*

**Ruth Dempsey:** You describe life as an adventure of self-cultivation that extends into old age . . .

**Ronald Nakasone:** That's right. In my essay, I highlighted the wisdom of three Asian elders within the framework of Confucius' life-review. At the age of 70, the master looked back on his life and identified six distinct stages in his education. It has become increasingly obvious to me, as I venture into elderhood that, more often than not, elders have an uncommon wisdom that comes from being around a while.

For example, long-lived elders have the rare gift of patient listening and deep gratitude that comes from being knocked down and working through their disappointments and losses. This journey cultivates wisdom and ease.

**RD:** Children learn self-cultivation early. Can you give me an example from your own childhood?

**RN:** I grew up on a farm in rural Hawaii. From a young age I was given responsibilities to care for the farm animals and to do odd jobs. I suppose learning one's place in the family is the beginning of self-cultivation. My mother reminded me of an ancient proverb: At the age of 10, a son could do the work of his father's right arm. I must have been a super son. I always completed my chores in a wink, so I could run off to swim at the nearby beach.

**RD:** Becoming an elder in Japanese culture means becoming a mentor. Can you describe one of your mentors and how he influenced you?

**RN:** I have been fortunate. I have had many mentors. My first models were my parents and grandparents. My grandfather began work before the sun was up; my father often worked until after the sun set. Later in life, I was most impressed by my *kendō* (Japanese fencing) *sensei* or teacher, who placed great value on promise keeping.

Early one snowy Sunday morning, he knocked on our apartment door to tell me that he was unable to keep our appointment. He located us by asking residents in a strange neighborhood quite a distance from his home. Irene

and I had just moved to Kyoto and had no telephone. I had not given him my address, mentioned only the general area in which we lived. In traditional hierarchical Japanese society there was no need for him to extend such courtesy to a novice student.

Since then I go to great lengths to honour promises.

**RD: Your essay features many inspiring stories. I liked the one about the grandmother.**

**RN:** Yes, for the article, I tried to locate elder mentors from my own life, but I chanced on the grandmother story in *The Lioness in Bloom*. I think the story is typical of elder wisdom. I have come to appreciate the insight women have of human nature and their gentle mentoring.

**RD: Hitting age 60 is a big deal in Japan. Why 60? And how do you celebrate?**

**RN:** In the past, few people lived to be 60. It's a major milestone in countries that follow the Chinese zodiac. Sixty years completes one life cycle and the beginning of new one.

The occasion is marked with great fanfare and feasting. The "newborn" elder is adorned in red, perhaps a red hat or vest. In Hawaii, the elder is presented with a double red carnation lei. Red represents birth and life. In Japanese, a newborn is called *akachan*, "little red one."

**RD: Japan has many late-life celebrations . . .**

**RN:** Yes. In Japanese culture, the 60th birthday or *kanreki* begins a series of late life celebrations. Following on that, the 70th, 77th, 80th, 88th, 90th and 99th birthdays are auspicious milestones.

The 70th year is *koki* or a "rare age celebration." The eight-century Chinese poet Tu fu wrote, "Since ancient times, the age of 70 has always been rare in human life." In a time when life expectancy was 50 years, to live for 70 years was indeed a rare event. The 77th year or *kiju* is a joyous event. The 80th year is *sanju*. *Beijū* celebrates the 88th year; the 90th year is *sotsuju* and the 99th year is *hakuju*.

These late life celebrations give elders milestones to look forward to, and [these celebrations] are public expressions of filiality.

For example, my mother, to mark her father's 90th birthday, not only sponsored a banquet, she built him a new house. Mother warned these late life celebrations could be expensive because after the "official" celebration elders expect an even bigger birthday bash every year thereafter.

**RD: The mentoring process continues on even after death. Can you describe the Japanese memorial cycle for me?**

**RN:** In addition to late celebrations, traditional Japan has a long and complex mortuary and memorial cycle.

After the funeral, the family sponsored – some still do – a service every seventh day until the 49th day to mark the day of departure. Subsequently, a memorial service is held on the first, third, seventh, 13th, 25th and 33rd year anniversary of death. On the island of Okinawa, the 33rd year memorial service marks the complete transition of the individual to an ancestral spirit or *kami*.

After the service, the family usually enjoys a communal meal. It is a time to share memories and reinforce family ties. Through participation, children come to know that they are part of a complex family relationship that extends into the past. In a real sense, the honored deceased is the host; he or she is the reason for the family to gather.

Outside the homeland, the community has abbreviated the traditional memorial cycle. Today, families often live great distances apart, and modern work schedules make it difficult to observe the ritual calendar.

**RD: Up until recently, aging was a family affair . . .**

**RN:** My grandfather immigrated to Hawaii in 1906. During the past 103 years my family's memories of our ancestral traditions have faded. While we still honor our elders with late life celebrations and memorial observances, our approach to aging is not appreciably different from the modern life-style of most American families.

Long distance caregiving, in-home care, respite care for the caregiver, assisted living and nursing care, living wills, medical power of attorney and long term care insurance are now part of our lives.

**RD: Finally, what do you value most about aging the Asian way?**

**RN:** Asian cultures still maintain much of the traditional image of elders – that they should be respected and cared for.

More important, elders are expected to grow in wisdom, a great responsibility perhaps. But I am looking forward to this continuing journey. Who knows where this adventure will lead?

### **Study: Rugby: A Haven of Friendship for Middle-aged Men**

Rugby is tough. And playing rugby at any age above 35 is tougher.

But every day, middle-age men across North America "sprint" down a grassy field doing lineouts and scrums. Why?

In a new paper published in *Leisure Studies* (December 11, 2012), researchers have found that rugby offers men a haven of friendship in the middle years, and beyond. Two further motivators include love of the game and self-actualization.

The research was led by Erwei Dong, an assistant professor in the department of health, physical education and leisure studies at the University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL, U.S.A.

The study was based on interviews with a small group of amateur rugby players from a rugby club in the Southeast United States. Men ranged in age from 35 to 52 years of age.

### **Friendship**

Researchers said men talked about team bonding and the sense of belonging to a network of friends. They also mentioned their friendship with competitors.

"Bob," a 35-year-old front desk clerk, explained:

Rugby is a ruffian sport played by gentlemen. You can see this in the way two teams beat the hell out of each other, then after the game, sit around and have a beer together, as if they were old friends.

Also, participants said rugby offered opportunities to meet players from other parts of the world. "I have three friends now," remarked one participant. "One's South African, one's Australian and one's from England."

One player summed up what rugby meant to him this way:

Rugby has been a second family. In a club, you have men of all ages, which can bring you drinking buddies, mentors, teachers, students and brothers. It is somewhat of a fraternity, where the members are of any age . . . rugby has given me people to ask for help and give help to.

### **Love of the game**

The players described rugby as a enjoyable game that demanded time and a high level of skill.

Said "Scott":

We practice Tuesday and Thursday nights together . . . get together on Saturday morning as well . . . travel sometimes pretty good distances to play an 80-minute game because we need to improve our skills.

The men claimed that love of the game helped them to cope with fear of injuries. "I have already suffered a serious injury that required nine months of physical therapy," remarked one participant. "And I am still playing."

For many, just participating in the game was a source of pride. For example, "Kent," 49, had played amateur rugby for more than three decades. He talked about playing at all the levels: collegiate, club, union, regional and Old Boys.

### **Self-actualization**

Also, the study found that men experienced psychological fulfillment in their life through rugby.

"Nick" explained:

It's been a life of total abundance, you know everybody does everything they can to their fullest . . . they play with abundance, they drink with the same thing . . . everything they do is in total . . . just to the max and that's why I love going on tour with rugby people.

Finally, players said the game kept them mentally sharp. "Rugby not only teaches loyalty, but also endurance, toughness of mind and spirit," one participant remarked. "It also makes you think on your feet."

*Editor's note: For more about male friendship, check out our interview with Geoffrey Greif, author of Buddy System at [AHB March/April 2010](#).*

## ROUNDUP

**GERMANS FORCED TO SEEK CARE ABROAD:** Spiraling costs and falling standards are forcing growing numbers of Germans to seek retirement homes and long-term care far from home.

In 2011, researchers found an estimated 7,146 Germans living in retirement homes in Hungary, according to the *Guardian* (December 26/28, 2012). There were more than 600 in Slovakia, and more than 3,000 had been sent to homes in the Czech Republic. Unknown numbers have moved to Spain, Greece and Ukraine. Thailand and the Philippines are attracting increasing numbers.

Some choose to move because costs are lower, between a third and two-thirds of the price in Germany. Hannelore Könnemann, a 78-year-old former shop owner, is delighted with her new retirement home, a three-room flat on the banks of Lake Balaton in Hungary. "I've always been adventurous, and I have learned some Hungarian," she said.

Könnemann pays at least a third less than she would in Germany for accommodation, meals and medical care. And she touts the extras that are

thrown in: daily fitness classes, twice-monthly house visits from a hairdresser and a pedicure.

One of Könnemann's neighbours, Ilse Puderbach, 84, pays less than half of what she would have to pay in Germany to live at Senior Care. "But it is not what I would have chosen," she said.

The trend, nicknamed "oma export" ("granny export"), has stoked anger across the country.

As Sabine Jansen, head of Germany's Alzheimer Society said: "In particular, people with dementia can find it difficult to orientate themselves in a wholly other culture with a completely different language, because they're very much living in an old world consisting of their earlier memories."

But with one in 15 Germans (about 4.7 million people) expected to be in need of care by 2050, German MP Willi Zylajew concedes alternative forms of elder care will need to be considered, including foreign care.

Meanwhile, a variety of healthcare providers are opening homes in Eastern Europe and Asia dedicated to the care of older Germans.

**ART PROGRAM A HIT WITH OLDER ADULTS:** British physicians are prescribing art classes for older adults, and they are winning rave reviews from patients.

The Prescription for Art program is an offshoot of Good Times, an outreach program for older adults launched by London's historic [Dulwich Picture Gallery](#) in 2005.

The art museum, which relies entirely on grants and donations, is home to a collection of Baroque old master paintings.

The Prescription for Art program was developed in partnership with family doctors. It was designed for individuals and carers who do not attend regular seniors groups, especially older men.

The monthly program is offered free of charge, and powered by a rota of artists and a team of committed volunteers.

Art activities are deliberately challenging and mentally stimulating. Sessions have included silk painting, sketching, lino printing, glass painting and clay work.

The refreshment break is a highlight of each two-hour session. Older adults mingle and chat as they enjoy tea, coffee, cake and fresh fruit.

A 2010 review by the Oxford Institute of Ageing (Oxford University, London, England) gave the program a ringing affirmation.

"It was lots of fun," remarked one participant. "I love the creative, relaxing aspects of the art."

*Source: guardian.co.uk*

**CO-HOUSING ATTRACTS INTEREST:** As the population ages, Canadians are reviewing their housing options.

New housing trends are increasingly on the radar, including co-housing, which has a long history in Denmark. Individuals have their own private space but share common areas like the kitchen and living room.

Co-housing projects already exist in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. Dozens more are in the planning stages. They include projects for couples, singles, families and older adults.

In the meantime, the Canadian Cohousing Network has produced a sparkling six-minute video [Building Community With Cohousing](#), that celebrates the benefits of intergenerational living.

**WALKING THE ROAD OF LEARNING:** An epic foot journey by journalist Paul Salopek follows the migration pathways of our ancestors, who walked out of Africa about 60,000 years ago.

In early January, Salopek began his seven-year trek from the small Ethiopian village of Herto Bouri. He will move across the Ethiopian desert, through the Middle East, Asia, hop over to Alaska, down the western United States to Central and South America and end in Chile.

On his 34,000-kilometre (21,000-mile) journey, Salopek will cross 30 borders and walk along side people from diverse cultures and dozens of languages.

As he moves across the world, *The National Geographic* will publish his dispatches. You can follow his journey at the [Out of Eden](#) website.