

Challenges of people with dementia and their informal carers using assistive technology and telecare at home

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Background

- People with dementia may find completing everyday tasks difficult.
- Informal carers support people with dementia with completing these tasks, but may face their own health, social, or economic challenges.
- People with dementia often move into care homes when carers feel that they are unable to help them remain at home.
- Assistive technology and telecare (ATT) may be an alternative care solution that can meet these challenges and help people with dementia stay in their own homes for longer.
- Assistive technology is "any item, piece of equipment, product or system, whether acquired commercially, off the shelf, modified or customised that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with cognitive, physical or communication disabilities"¹.
- People with dementia may not remember how to use the assistive technology or forget that it is installed.
- Assistive technology may introduce new challenges to the person with dementia's routine².

Aims and Methodology

- The aim of this study is to explore how and why people with dementia and their informal carers use or choose not to use ATT at home.
- To research these experiences, we designed a focussed ethnography that links with a randomised controlled trial called ATTILA (Assistive Technology and Telecare to maintain Independent Living At home for people with dementia).
- This poster examines one family's experience of using an automatic falls detector.

"He had a fall before the last [12 week] visit [for ATTILA]" where he "fell down four or five stairs" in the home. The device had not gone off. "Yet when I stubbed my big toe on the wall one time, the alarm went off!" - Mark

"This is how often this detector goes off. Every time there is a 30p connection fee and it costs £5 per minute. His phone bill has doubled since he got this detector." - Mark



Figure 2. Automatic falls detector

Mark told me that that he had "different expectations" for the device. When the alarm is activated it calls Arthur's home, but Arthur does not always respond due to not being able to hear the incoming call from the service provider. "He doesn't pick up the phone because he can't hear it and the phone is even louder than the alarm. Next, they call me to see if I am with my dad because his detector has activated on his falls detector. They [the service provider] don't check though." "They must send somebody over," I suggested. "No, they go through all four contacts first to see if one of them can go over. What am I paying for?" – Fieldnotes from 13 August 2015

Discussion

Rather than helping to reassure Mark and Catherine, Arthur's falls detector has caused other issues. It has increased Arthur's phone bill and disrupted sleeping when it accidentally goes off yet failed to go off during an actual fall. Despite the evidence that the device does not appear to be "ready-to-hand", Mark and Catherine still want to keep the device. Arthur's night calls to the call centre hint at a potential *bricoleur*³ role by repurposing the to meet another potential need, i.e. reducing loneliness. Further fieldwork is required to explore these aspects.

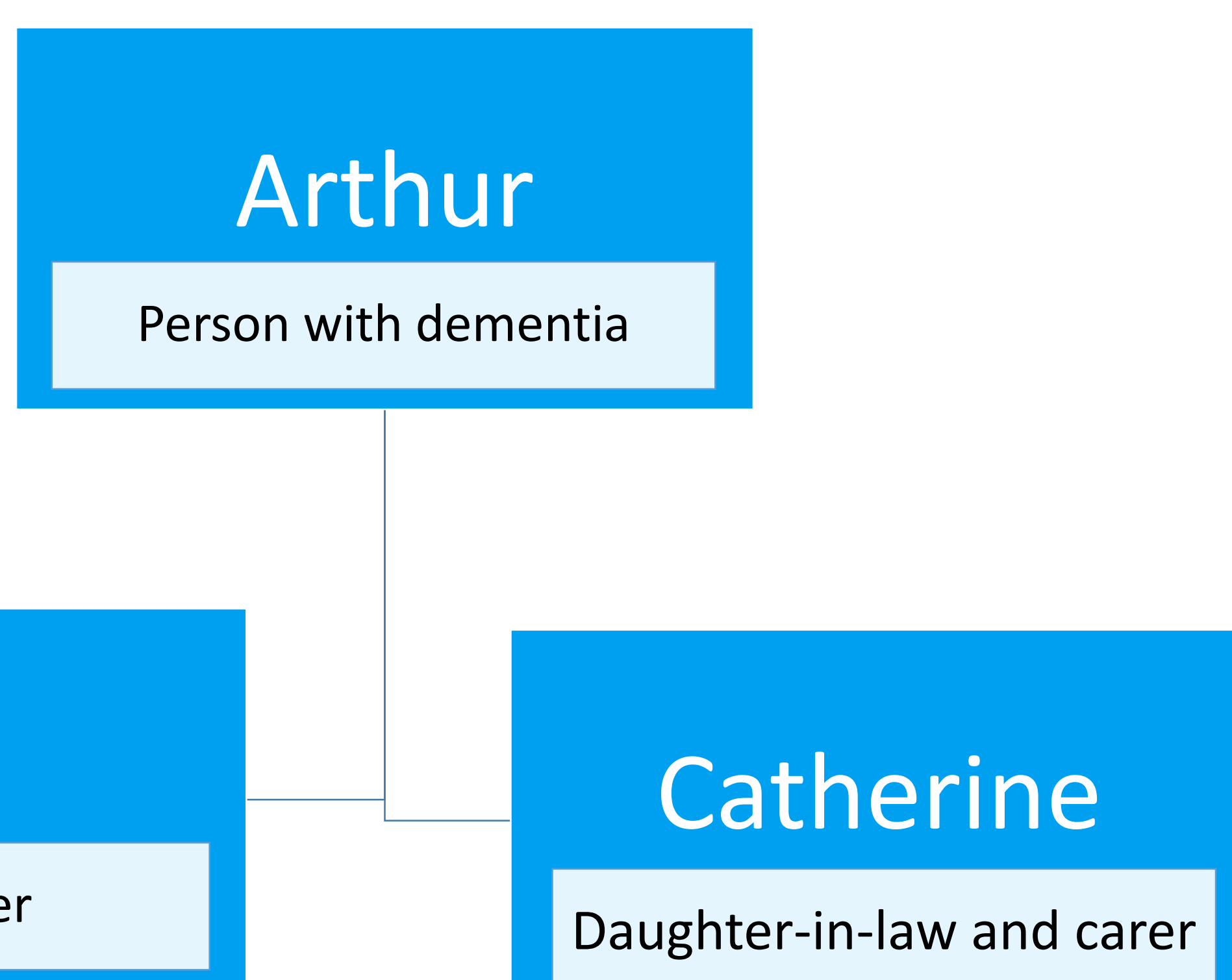


Figure 1. Clyde Family

