

FEEDBACK FROM COBALT WORKSHOP AT ST MARY'S CHURCH AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, SHEFFIELD: THURSDAY, 23rd MAY 2013-05-24

I attended the above workshop event on behalf of Future Years, following a personal invitation received at the recent AGE UK annual policy Conference that I attended and where COBALT had a stand. I wanted to learn more about new developments in telecare and telehealth and what progress is being made in this region and particularly in Sheffield.

COBALT = **C**hallenging **O**bstacles and **B**arriers to **A**ssistive Living **T**echnology and is a research consortium of Reading, Sheffield and St Andrews Universities. See www.cobaltproject.org. Their aim is to work with users and providers to create the next generation of care products and services and to investigate the social and behavioural factors affecting the adoption of Assistive Living Technology (ALT) among older people.

About 80 people attended the event with representation from Sheffield City Council, Age UK, users, Care Home staff, Occupational Therapists, Healthwatch, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals etc. The day was very participative and with plenty of opportunity for questions.

Key messages that emerged during the day were:

- Need for better communications to health and care professionals as well as potential beneficiaries, on what is available. I was amazed at the sheer variety and sophistication of pill dispensers that are now available for example!
- ALT products to be marketed as a way of enabling people to live the way they want to
- Initial acceptance of ALT would be helped by attractive and intuitive design and clear instructions
- The risk of abandonment would be minimised if help was available through friends, family and peer groups
- There is no one size fits all
- Cost is an important consideration. The business case must produce clear evidence that the change will improve outcomes and save budget
- There needs to be closer and better integration between health and social care teams (and we know that Leeds City Council has now got neighbourhood based, integrated Health and Social Care Teams and I learnt today that Sheffield has also adopted that approach), Such Teams need inhouse ALT expertise.
- GPs will clearly have an important role to play
- Initiatives such as re-ablement, self-care and falls prevention are good starting points and Occupational Therapists are the natural technology champions.

I made a few useful contacts including Aidan Parr from the Foundation for Assistive Technology and I intend to register for his Organisations newsletter and Annual Parliamentary Report.

I also think that it is worth Future Years, LOPF and Care & Repair Leeds considering inviting a speaker to a future meeting to gain a greater understanding of what is now out there in terms of ALT.

John Welham 24/5/13