

Welcome to Gerontechnology 2002: Creative use of technology for better aging

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*S. Czaja, N. Charness, A.D. Fisk, W. Rogers. Welcome to Gerontechnology 2002:
Creative use of technology for better aging. Gerontechnology 2002; 2(1):1-2.*

Technology is increasingly becoming integral to work, education, and everyday tasks such as bill paying and shopping. People of all ages must learn to incorporate technology into their lives. Technology also offers the potential of improving the quality of life and functional independence of older adults. Although technology may benefit the lives of older people, some technologies present a challenge for this population of users. To this end the field of Gerontechnology has evolved and involves the study of technology and aging for the improvement of the daily functioning of the elderly. This issue presents the keynote addresses and abstracts from the fourth international conference on Gerontechnology held in Miami Beach, Florida, November 2002. The focus of the conference is on creative use of technology to promote successful aging. The conference has a broad international, multi-disciplinary perspective and a broad array of topics are covered including transportation, health care, workplace technologies, care giving, life long learning, and technology in the home.

Keywords: technology, aging, caregiving, transportation, lifelong learning.

The increased number of older people in the population and the increased reliance on technology in most societal contexts has created a need for the systematic study of technology and aging. By the year 2030 people aged 65+ will represent approximately 22 % of the US population. At the same time that

the population is aging all forms of technology including computer and communication devices and safety and health monitoring devices are increasingly becoming integral to work, education, and everyday life. In other words, to function effectively in today's world people of all ages need to successfully

incorporate technology into their lives. Technology also offers the potential to enhance the independence and well-being of older people by enhancing their ability to communicate, access information, and perform routine tasks. Unfortunately many older adults face challenges when attempting to interact with current technologies. Currently, compared to other age groups, use of technology is low among older people.

Ensuring that current and future generations of older adults will be able to successfully use technology and realize the benefits that technology has to offer requires a systematic study of aging and technology to identify how and why technology is difficult to use by older adults and how technology can be effectively used to facilitate the lives of older people. Furthermore, the results of this research need to be translated into information and guidelines that can be used by practitioners and the design community. To this end the multi-disciplinary field of Gerontechnology has evolved. Formally, Gerontechnology has been defined as 'the study of technology and aging for the improvement of the daily functioning of the elderly'¹. Applications of Gerontechnology include the use of technology to: (i) prevent or delay disability and declines in functioning; (ii) compensate for age-related functional declines; (iii) enhance the quality of life and creativity of older people; (iv) support family members and caregivers; and (v) promote applied and basic research related to technology and aging². A basic tenet of the field is that older adults should be considered as active users of technology and involved in design and implementation processes.

This issue presents the program from the Fourth International Conference on Gerontechnology held in Miami Beach, Florida (November 2002). This is the first time the conference is being held in the United States and Miami Beach was an ideal location given the large and diverse number of older people in the South Florida community. Consistent with the field the scope of the conference is broad and multi-disciplinary. The central theme of the conference is on discovering creative uses of technology to promote successful aging. Topics include workplace issues; mobility, creativity and socialization, telehealth and health supports, care giving, technology in home environments; and life long learning. The keynote addresses, paper sessions, and posters reflect the most current research within these areas. The participants and keynote speakers are drawn from around the world and include the most prominent leaders within the field and related areas. The overall goal of the conference is to exchange ideas and information and promote future interactions and research within this important and exciting area. The next meeting will be held in Japan in 2005. We anticipate that the field will experience tremendous growth and that there will be an abundance of new information as well as new questions and challenges between this meeting and the upcoming meeting in 2005.

References

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