

M. GILHOOLY, K. GILHOOLY, R. JONES. *Quality of life: Conceptual challenges in exploring the role of ICT in active ageing*. *Gerontechnology* 2010;9(2):283; doi:10.4017/gt.2010.09.02.144.00

Purpose The past ten years have seen considerable interest in exploring ways to promoting active and successful ageing. The view that information and communication technology (ICT) is key to promoting successful ageing is widespread. It is frequently argued that the current digital divide between the young and the old leads to social exclusion and, hence, a lower quality of life for older adults; correspondingly, teaching older people how to use ICT will enhance their quality of life. ICTs are also believed to have the potential to allow older people to stay active and productive for longer. Although the term 'quality of life' pervades discussion of health care and social policy, and improving quality of life is an avowed aim of many Western governments, there is remarkably little consensus on what this term means, let alone how if improvements in quality of life are a realistic outcome measure of policies, interventions, or government expenditure¹. **Method** The aim of this poster is to outline the definitional challenges associated with the term quality of life, measurement challenges, the challenges associated with enhancing quality of life, the role of ICT in quality of life in old age and, finally, comments on the challenges of a modern information society for older people. **Results & Discussion** The term quality of life started as a social scientific index of the relative well-being of whole populations, i.e. the state of states². Nowadays quality of life is more likely to be viewed as an individualized aspect of the modern psyche. This shift in conceptualisation is problematic in that, if quality of life is individualized, it cannot be meaningful to assess it in the same way for everyone. Because wealth, health and social relations have all been found to be prime determinants of subjective quality of life, if ICTs are to enhance quality of life for older people, they need to mediate the relationships between these three important factors and quality of life. To date there is little evidence that ICT has improved quality of life for older people³. One of the explanations for the lack of impact is associated with how we assess quality of life; the measures are too remote, blunt and multifactorial to be affected. This poster ends by asking if quality of life is a meaningless term and if the future is bleak for old people in a modern information society. The answer to both questions is no.

References

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