

Four decades: A longstanding interest in technology and older people

Anthea Tinker PhD^{a,*}

^aDepartment of Global Health and Social Medicine, Bush House, The Strand, King's College London, United Kingdom; *Corresponding author: anthea.tinker@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract

This article presents a review of publications of the author as related to technology supporting Ageing-in-Place for older people to prevent or delay residential care. In four decades, the focus developed from the increasing number of assistive technologies both in the UK and elsewhere that started to reshape home care, towards the views of older people themselves, their perceived needs and the technologies they considered acceptable. It was followed by improving the availability of information for older persons. Influencing (inter)national policies formed the last step.

Keywords: ageing-in-place, home care, older people's needs, policies

My interest in technology (later Gerontechnology) goes back to 1984 when I was in the Department of the Environment and undertook research on ways of keeping older people in homes of their own as opposed to moving to

residential care. Entitled 'Staying at home: Helping Elderly People' it covered a variety of options (Tinker, 1984). The cover showed an older lady looking out of a window with a telephone beside her together with photographs of her family. The report included a discussion of alarms in the context of other forms of community care such as visiting warden and informal care by neighbours. This was followed by more research on these and other options for older and disabled people including alarms and telephones (Tinker, 1989a,b,c). In 1991 I reported on the UK contribution in an international context (Tinker, 1991). This set the research in a wider context. In 1992 I undertook research commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation into telecommunications in the Third Age (Tinker, 1992). This was part of a major inquiry into the Third Age which covered a large number of environments and services.

I then contributed to an international comparative study of alarms and telephones in emergency responses (Tinker, 1993). This was part of a report on new types of home care. There followed a study of the contribution of younger people (Tinker, 2001). Part of the research was focus groups of older and younger people. In 2002 and 2003 the focus was on the views of older people (McCreadie et al., 2002; Seale et al., 2002; McCreadie & Tinker, 2003; Tinker et al., 2003a). This included the experience of the Netherlands which the researcher and I visited in 2003 (Tinker et al., 2003b). Attention turned to the role of housing in the general picture of provision of assistive technologies (Tinker, 2003). In 2004 a large research project on adapting the homes of older people produced a number of outputs including a focus on adaptations and



Figure 1. On her desk in July 2022 with the 1984 publication on Ageing-in-Place (photograph by Ly-
anne Wylde)

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their acceptability to older people (Tinker, 2004; Lansley et al., 2004a,b; McCreddie & Tinker, 2005; Tinker & Lansley, 2005).

Attention then turned to improving the provision of information on assistive technology (McCreddie et al., 2006, 2007). A large grant on technology and older people (funded by the Technology Strategy Board) produced a number of outputs including these publications: Tinker et al. (2013a,b) and Tinker et al. (2014a,b). The focus of the Technology Strategy Board at that time was on what they called the Long-Term Care Revolution. The Netherlands was given as an example.

A major effort has now been made to influence policy about the importance of technology for older people. Evidence was given to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Built Environment in person in 2016 (Tinker & Ginn, 2016) and written (Ward Thompson, 2016). Evidence was also

given to the London Commission (The London Commission, 2018). In the House of Lords inquiry into Ageing, Science, Technology and Healthy Living in 2019 this research was presented (House of Lords, 2021). To continue, I took up the co-lead of the work package for the qualitative part of the DELONELIENSS study (Rees et al., 2023).

Looking back four decades, I researched and wrote about what at the time were emerging technologies for home support of older people, some of these early assistive technologies we would now consider fairly primitive compared with the smart devices of today. However, a focus on the views of older people, their real needs and the technologies they would accept are nowadays just as important for a successful Ageing-in-Place as in the days of only the land-line telephone. It is time to include these insights in (inter)national policies.

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