

## Enhancing relationships with social, physical and technological environments

As people live longer and their environments change, this may place heavier relational demands upon them to learn and manage. However, such changes also offer the possibility of co-creating new types of relationship with those environments through which to access potentially positive support.

Perhaps raised expectations and horizons in populations with increasing life spans can bring their own problems. The review by Heuser and Howe of evidence of links between social isolation, suicide and suicidal thoughts in people aged over 60 years identified nine relevant reported studies. These indicated that loneliness and isolation are increasing and experienced as increasingly problematic for older people, when linked to depression and hopelessness, but that social isolation alone is not a simple causal factor for suicidal ideas or suicide.

The potentially problematic nature of new forms of communication and connection is highlighted by the media review conducted by Vermeer *et al.* of the nature of online marketing for surveillance technologies in the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands. Not only could these perhaps inadvertently equate people with dementia with animals and children, but reinforce almost universally prioritised emphases on safety concerns (not necessarily shared by the people subject to surveillance) with almost no attention being paid to also ensuring their dignity or person-centred relationships.

A more personal and responsive approach may be suggested by the development of “care navigator” roles for supporting older people and their families through the complexities of modern fragmenting care systems. Funk’s study in a Western Canadian city, using interview data and discourse analysis, shows how a critical view can reveal the need for such roles to cover more than information needs. She suggests that perhaps providers can take a broader and more pre-emptive look at the issues posed, maybe working to integrate services more so that the need for navigating may be less likely to arise.

Such studies suggest that supportive relationships are not simply determined by the physical characteristics of changing environments, nor physical limitations imposed by ageing, but can be flexibly negotiated and co-produced as capabilities of people, places and localities are actively reviewed and reassessed.