

The Carers Project



New markets, new opportunities

Populations are ageing - in 2007, the number of pensioners outnumbered children for the first time in UK history. But hospitals and the healthcare system are not designed to cope with caring for this ageing population.

The market for in home monitoring devices is growing. These devices do not necessarily take into account informal carers who are involved in the daily lives of those they care for.

“We are expected to act as a conduit, communicating information between all the different healthcare professionals” (Lynne)

Connected devices that integrate the needs of both the carer and the cared-for have the potential to open up new markets.

Technology services that help the needs of carers will have a beneficial effect on those they care for.

Instrata set out to explore how carers can be assisted by new technologies that are designed to help them in their everyday lives.

Our approach

The people who are most knowledgeable are the carers themselves. We met with carers in their homes to discuss their day to day lives and to understand what it means to be a carer.

Carers present different circumstances; from a mother caring for her heavily disabled child, to a husband looking after his wife with a long term condition, to a daughter caring for her elderly parents. And they all have a story to tell. We encountered tears, laughter, and a deep sense of determination to do the best for the person they care for.

“It’s very important that I’m involved in my wife’s appointments and treatments, she will often forget the information she’s given as there are so many details” (Robert)

We discussed their encounters with the healthcare system and the professionals within it, the tools and technology they use, their experiences and the impact caring has had on their lives.

So what did we find?

The need for information

Carers need to have information about the services available to them, they need to know what to expect for specific conditions, they need training in how to cope with new equipment, and support for how to deal with their emotions and the emotions of the person they care for.

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Support for their involvement

Carers often find themselves acting as a conduit of information between healthcare professionals. They want to be part of the decision making process for treatments, included in appointments and treated with respect.

Social support

Many carers benefit from talking with other carers, whilst others would rather not spend their free time chatting about their situation but would prefer instead distractions and contact with friends and family.

Coordinating care

Many carers or the person they cared for kept notes and log books to track care issues. Record keeping and managing appointments was essential but time-consuming and complicated.

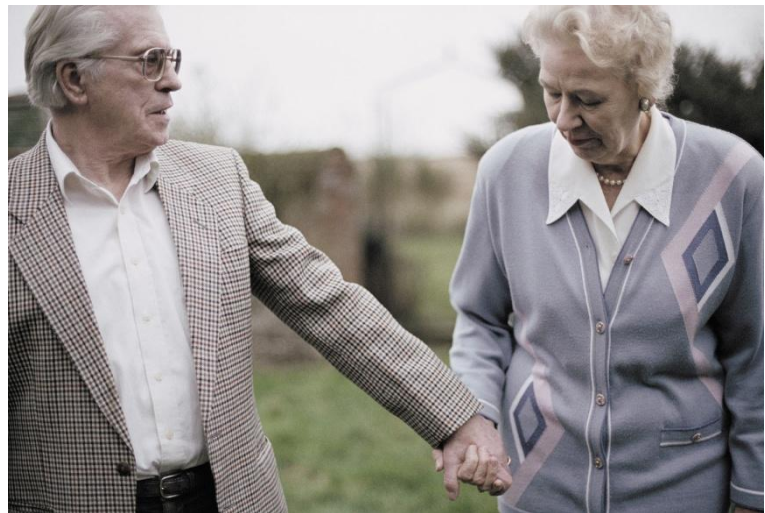
“I only found out about the motability allowance in a chance encounter with another mother at a swimming for the disabled class, it gave my son his freedom as he can drive now” (Laura)

We used these themes to generate new opportunities for products and services that can support carers in their daily life. For example, a new service could provide access to online and offline training videos including how to conduct basic physiotherapy exercises and beneficial coping strategies for carers.

Potential opportunities

Currently there are 6 million carers in the UK and this number is growing rapidly. New technologies can certainly support carers and so support the people being cared for.

“It’s very easy to get sucked into the caring role and never having any time off. You can end up directing all of your mental and physical time towards the person you’re caring for and that can be very self-destructive.”
(Nigel)



About Instrata

Instrata identifies and shapes the development of technology solutions by creating new opportunities and differentiating existing products and services. We are a multidisciplinary team of designers, technologists, strategists and ethnographers, operating globally. Clients include P&G, Virgin, Microsoft, Nokia, Vodafone, RIM and the BBC.

info@instrata.co.uk / +44 (0)1223 301101