

Improving access to Assistive Living Technologies in the Community

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Aim

Assistive living technology (ALT) can both increase independence for people living with physical disabilities and improve quality of life for elderly adults living with chronic conditions. The aim of this joint project between the Disabled Living Centre (DLC), the Environmental Control Service (ECS) (both part of SMART Services) and the Neurological Occupational Therapy Service was to trial a new way of integrating ALT equipment assessments with routine home visits by the latter service's occupational therapists (OTs) and to inform and guide future provision.

Methods

The five OTs who participated in the trial underwent training before being provided with ALT equipment to use with their patients. After the trial, they each completed a purpose designed questionnaire.

Results

Figure 1 and 2 below demonstrate the views of the occupational therapists regarding their patient's perceptions of the technology.

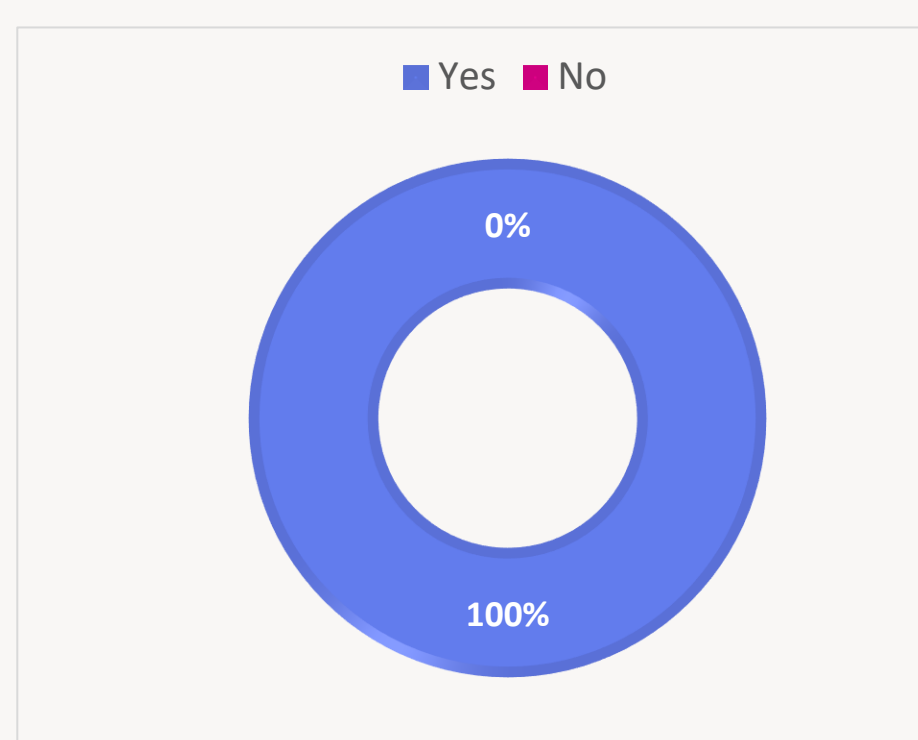


Figure 1: Did the patients observe challenges when introducing the technology?

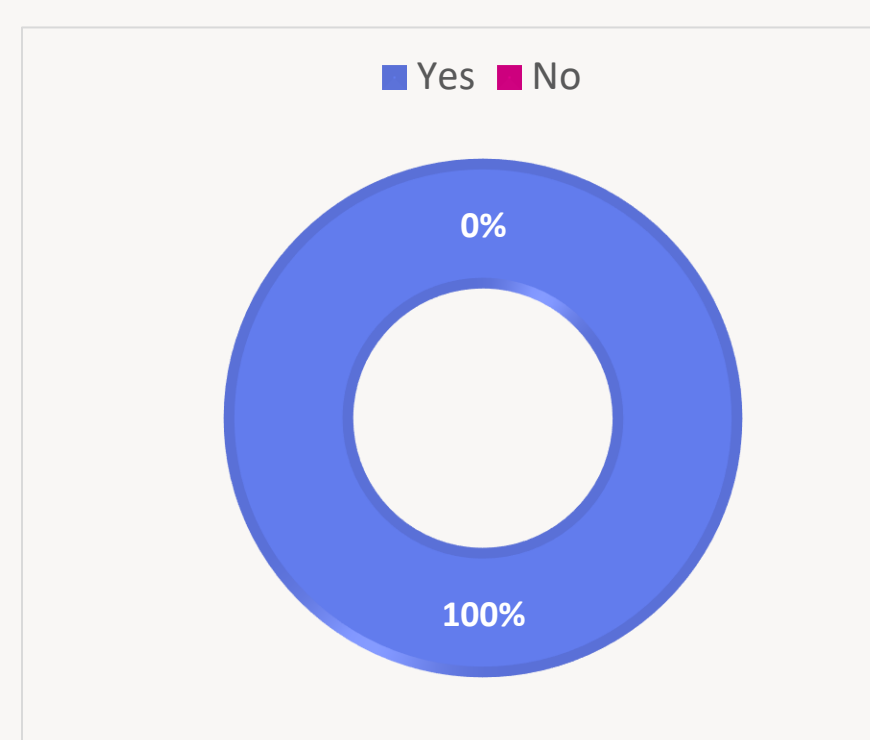
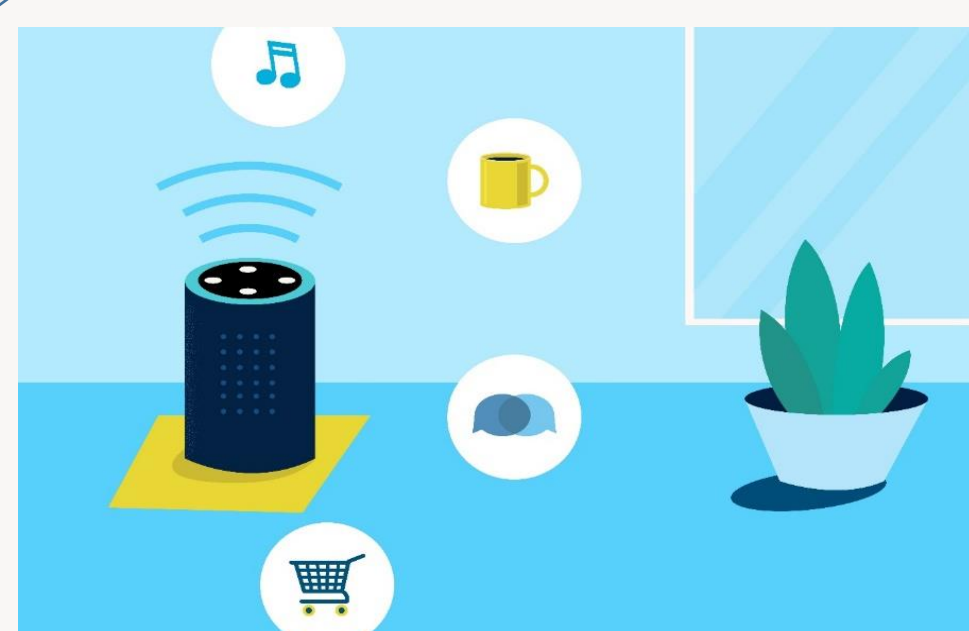


Figure 2: Did the technology empower the patients to better manage their daily lives?

'Lack of familiarity with basic tech (e.g. mobile phone) so option of introducing any additional tech is often overwhelming. For patients less familiar with tech who have no limited family support, OT confidence that they could resolve tech issues is low.'

'To be able to control their environmental independently, increase safety within the home, support with productivity and reducing reliance on others.'



Figures 3, 4 and 5 below demonstrate the views of the occupational therapists with regard to their confidence, training, and perceived barriers in relation to the technology.

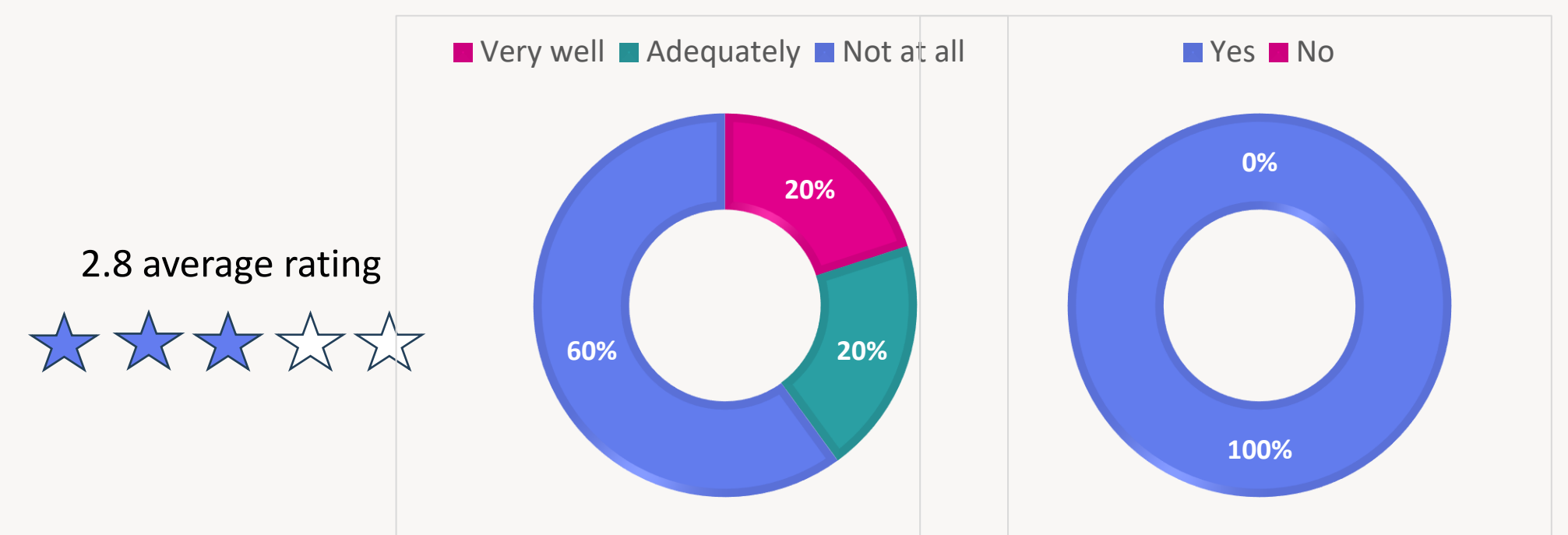


Figure 3: How confident are you in your ability to use technology?

Figure 4: Do you feel trained and supported to integrate technologies into your practice?

Figure 5: Were barriers experienced and if so what were the barriers.

'Confidence and knowledge to recommend patients on technology and then the supporting to implement the use into daily practice. I don't feel confident recommending clients to purchase pricy tech that may not benefit them.'



'Sometimes people's willingness to engage with technology. Also, reduced confidence in setting this up.'

'More training opportunities exploring the most appropriate/used tech options and how to implement into a client's routine for the better.'

Discussion

Despite the training and having access to support, it was found that the OTs lacked confidence with using the technology, and their engagement tailed off so that the ALT equipment was not used as initially expected. Nevertheless, the OTs reported that the technology had a positive impact and added value to the assessment process, such as supporting self-management and providing access to equipment to facilitate independent living and achievement of occupational goals. These were despite the observed challenges that included reduced patient cognition, lack of finance to purchase equipment and low levels experience with using even basic technology.

Conclusion

ALT equipment can provide life-enhancing improvements to patients though the challenge remains to find the most effective and efficient way to improve access to the independent expert advice and support they need. The three services aim to continue to collaborate to explore other ways to improve access to ALT in the community.