**Engaging primary care systems in digital health technologies**

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**THE CHALLENGE**

Our ageing population combined with the exponential rise in chronic disease has placed huge resource burdens on primary care systems. Digital technologies are being utilised to address these issues but they often face many difficulties when implemented in real-world settings. Engaging and recruiting key stakeholders in primary care is one important aspect of the eHealth implementation process that is not well understood.

**Aim**

The aim of this study is to:

1) explore how eHealth recruitment strategies are being implemented in a large scale (£37 million) digital innovation programme called Delivering Assisted Living Lifestyles at Scale (dallas)⁴.
2) examine the factors affecting recruitment to digital health and wellbeing products and services in primary care.

**Method**

Secondary analysis of project documentation (n=25/163) and interviews (n=34) conducted with key members of the dallas implementation teams was performed. Interviews were based on the eHealth Implementation Toolkit² and carried out between October 2012 and October 2014. A framework approach was used to produce a thematic analysis of factors that affected digital health recruitment in primary care².

**Findings**

**Barriers to eHealth engagement in primary care**

- Health service limitations
- Lack of IT infrastructure in the National Health Service (NHS)
- Poor technical skills among primary care practitioners (a)
- Clinical resistance due to changing work practices & professional roles
- Traditional views of healthcare
- Lack of awareness & understanding of the benefits of digital health technology
- Fear of reduced quality of interaction with primary care provider
- Challenges with digital accessibility
- Poor digital literacy skills among some end users
- Little access to computer equipment and/or Internet for end users (b)

**Facilitators to eHealth engagement in primary care**

- Champion initiatives
- Digital champion programme improving participation of end users in the community
- Novel recruitment strategies
- Utilising established community organisations and networks for promotional work and as digital hubs for upskilling end users (d)
- Innovation engagement methods such as a mobile and virtual ‘Smarthouse’ to raise awareness and improve understanding among the general public

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<th>BARRIERS</th>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
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<td>(a) “some of the health staff are you know are still struggling with you know minimal actual computer use” (Participant 4)</td>
<td>(c) “Champions is definitely something we’re trying … identifying people who are saying we like the product, we can see how this product would work for us and we want to use it. ” (Participant 6)</td>
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<td>(b) “It seems to be even the very poor families smart phones are essential tools for them. What they haven’t necessarily got is the connectivity” (Participant 7)</td>
<td>(d) “we also work with a variety of different providers such as [anon] … do carers assessments and what we’ve built into those assessments is assessments on whether or not they, as a carer, could benefit through the use of technology, not just the person who’s afflicted but also the carer.” (Participant 10)</td>
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**Conclusion**

- A number of factors affect participation in real-world digital health initiatives. Valuable lessons about how to engage a range of individuals can be learned from these.
- Some barriers to eHealth recruitment reflect those of other large telehealth initiatives such as the Whole System Demonstrator⁸.
- More research is needed to examine in detail how digital health engagement can be implemented at scale and how to maximise buy-in and uptake from a range of stakeholders.

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**References**


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