DATA SAVES LIVES: older people's views on health data

Theme for Community Reporter training (Oct-Nov 2016)

For more info, see www.herc.ac.uk/research_project/community-reporters

WHAT ARE HEALTH DATA?

Health data include any type of information related to your wellbeing and to how you feel.

This project focuses on health data that you could collect yourself.

You may use health data to: monitor your own wellbeing; keep your family, friends, or doctor up-to-date on your health; motivate yourself to live healthier.

Read the stories over the page for examples of how this might work in everyday life.

YOUR TASK

We'd like you to address these questions in your community reports:

1. What is your view on what health data are?

2. What types of health data do you already collect, or could you collect in the future? How might you do this?

3. Do you use health data to monitor aspects of your own health? If so, why and how do you do this? If not, why not?

4. How could collecting and using health data to monitor health become easier and more attractive, especially for older people?

Edna is 66 years old. After gaining a stone in the last year, she finds herself a weight loss plan on the internet. As part of the plan, she collects health data by completing a 'Food and activity chart' that she prints out and sticks on her fridge. Every day, Edna uses an online calorie checker to calculate the total amount of calories she had. She also records if and how long she exercised. To check whether she is still on track, she weighs herself at the start and end of each week. For Edna, completing the chart helps her to stick to her plan, and seeing her weight decrease motivates her to keep going.

Paul recently turned 70. Last week, his doctor told him his blood pressure was too high. Paul is keen to avoid extra medications, so together they draw up a plan of action based on his health data. As part of the plan, Paul takes home a blood pressure monitor to check that his blood pressure is not increasing any further. He checks it four times a day, and plots each reading on a chart. At his next appointment, he brings the chart and discusses the results with his doctor.

Sarah is a 68-year-old lady who has just been discharged from hospital following a hip replacement. As part of her rehabilitation programme, Sarah wears a Fitbit to track her activity. The Fitbit beeps if she achieves her daily target of 5,000 steps. As an additional motivator, she shares her activity data with the other people in the rehabilitation programme as part of friendly 'Weekly Step Count' competition.

John is having problems with his prostate and often gets up overnight to go to the toilet. His doctor asks him to keep a 'bladder diary' for 3 days, recording every time he passes urine, and measuring the volume. This helps John and his doctor to work out what the problem is. The doctor prescribes him a medication, and to monitor the success of the treatment, John keeps another 3-day bladder diary to bring to his next appointment.