

TECHNOLOGIES, TOOLS AND THEORIES FOR TACKLING AGEING INCONTINENCE

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The impact of continence difficulties is far more than the physical effort and expense of coping with the day to day management. Incontinence is a precursor to social isolation, loss of self esteem and depression. Inability to cope with incontinence is a major reason why people move into care. This project aims to reduce the impact of continence difficulties for older people by investigating (1) environmental barriers to continence (for example, public toilet design, provision and access), (2) normal continence services compared with specialist services, and (3) by developing assistive devices that both provide reassurance to continence pad users and make pad use less demanding. In this paper only the work-package focussing on assistive technology will be presented. Methods: Two assistive technologies are being developed in this project. (a) An inexpensive colour change odour-indicating formula is under development to indicate the presence of the odour of urine at a just imperceptible level. (b) A washable fabric underwear wetness sensor and alert mechanism is currently in the developmental phase. Potential user opinion is being canvassed via focus groups to identify desired forms for the sensor and underwear. Users will test the developed prototypes for acceptability. Results and discussion: The technology for the odour sensors has been developed, with 'sensitivity' currently under investigation. Prototypes will be shown and findings from user interviews described. Problems associated with development of the wetness detecting underwear include ensuring that the electrical mechanisms are not triggered by sweat, rather than urine will be outlined.