ICIC24 abstract: 'Empowering Care Workers Through Digital Innovation'

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Nursing home employees frequently face disturbances during their work without adequate support or knowledge to address them (Vermeerbergen e.a, 2021). Examples are: someone falls, medication is missing, resident information is incomplete. The CARECONNEX project addresses the critical need for efficient management of disturbances (Dessers e.a., 2023) to enhance care worker autonomy and excellence in integrated care delivery in nursing homes.

The project primarily serves the community of nursing home workers, including caregivers, nurses, administrative and logistical staff, with special attention for interim workers, new hires and students. The project has the active support of two major nursing home employer organisations and the engagement of four nursing home groups in Flanders, Belgium.

CARECONNEX involves a collaborative approach, engaging nursing home workers, management, technology experts, residents and informal caregivers. The project benefits from practical insights and experiences, ensuring that the developed tools meet the needs of the users. This co-design process involves interviews, focus groups, and user-centered design sessions.

CARECONNEX introduces two interconnected digital tools. (1) The SupportLine App aims to enable care workers to address disturbances autonomously within their work environment. Based on the nature of the disturbance, the tool either connects the user with a colleague capable of resolving the issue or offers a detailed procedure to effectively address the disturbance. The tool specifically targets disturbances that employees can't quickly solve on their own or with immediate help from peers. (2) The Dashboard Tool analyzes patterns of recurrent disturbances, facilitating the identification of optimal solutions and recommending necessary structural modifications.

The CARECONNEX tools stand out in their innovation, as they shift the focus from primarily supporting patients or residents to significantly aiding care professionals, a perspective not commonly emphasized in existing tools (van der Wegen, 2018). CARECONNEX offers valuable insights into managing care disturbances through digital solutions. It highlights the potential of technology to empower care workers and improve integrated care delivery, offering a model that can be adapted and applied in different international contexts.

This two-year project is currently still in its formative stages. At the conference, we will focus on presenting, and gathering feedback on, conceptual prototypes of the tools. We will share preliminary results from our work in participating nursing homes. In a later stage, following the successful development and testing of the tools in selected nursing homes, we will prepare the tools for market introduction. Our ultimate aim is to extend the application to other sectors with similar needs for managing recurrent disturbances.

Dessers, E., Ramioul, M., Vereycken, Y., Bal, M., Smits, I., & Van Hootegem, G. (2023). Analysing production disturbances for aligning work organisation, human resource management, and digital transformation. In A Research Agenda for Workplace Innovation. Edward Elgar Publishing.

van der Weegen, S. e.a. (2018), Technologie in de langdurende zorg. Inspiratie & mogelijkheden. Vilans.

Vermeerbergen, L., McDermott, A. M., & Benders, J. (2021). Managers shaping the service triangle: Navigating resident and worker interests through work design in nursing homes. Work and Occupations, 48(1), 70-98.