

Technology makes life easier for the elderly

SOCIAL WELFARE



Kenneth Au Young Ka-yu (left) and Dr Cheung Moon-wah with the devices to assist older people. Photo: Felix Wong

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Older citizens could benefit from mobility gadgets and computer-aided monitoring systems

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Hi-tech gadgetry is often associated with the younger generation – but a smart monitoring system that the Housing Society is testing may help the health of people at the other end of the age spectrum.

The smart home system, developed by Polytechnic University scientists and a research institute, was designed to make life safer and more convenient for older people, whose mobility was impaired, the society's elderly services manager Kenneth Au Yeung Ka-yu said.

The system includes motion sensors located in areas such as bathrooms, so if an elderly resident does not move for a time a signal will be sent to family members or monitoring centres.

"It will not invade their privacy as it will not show their faces, just monitor movement," Au Yeung said.

People will be able to test their pulses by placing their finger on the armrest of a chair or on a television remote control, in which a monitor has been installed, then check the results on a tablet computer.

A wireless control system will allow residents to control light switches, curtains and even open doors at the click of a mouse or by using the tablet computer.

"Elderly people may not be used

to using these new technologies, so we're trying to see whether they're convenient for them," Au Yeung said.

The society's elderly services general manager Dr Cheung Moon-wah said it would consider the responses from people who tried the system before deciding whether to use it in housing projects for elderly people at North Point and Tin Shui Wai in 2014 and after 2016, respectively.

The system has been on public display at the society's Elderly Resources Centre in Yau Ma Tei since last month. The society also plans to install the system in several vacant flats for rent in Cheerful Court in Ngau Tau Kok.

The centre, which reopened after renovation last month, also displays other helpful household items for elderly people, including an armchair which rises, a handle installed into sofas to help older people get up, a kitchen cupboard that can be lowered for wheelchair users, and wheelchair-friendly designs in bathrooms.

Cheung said the centre did not offer the products for sale, but provided information on where they could be bought.

12.6%

The proportion of the population aged 65 as at mid 2008. It is estimated that by 2016 the percentage will increase to 14%