A digital health platform to support aging in place: Experiences of people with dementia

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Background: Although most people with dementia (PwD) wish to live at home for longer, this can be challenging to achieve. To support extended independent living of PwD, innovative solutions have been developed, including digital platforms to facilitate care coordination and patient-caregiver communication, thereby helping PwD to stay in control of their health and care situation. In the Netherlands, the platform “Caren” has become one of the largest digital health platforms supporting PwD and their caregivers at home. However, insight into its added value according to PwD is still lacking. This study therefore aimed to analyze the experiences of PwD with the digital health platform Caren.

Method: A cross-sectional online survey was offered to users of Caren, containing questions related to usage behavior and a set of evaluation criteria: usability, impact on patient-caregiver communication, impact on care process, trust in the platform, and intention for continued use.

Results: 202 community-dwelling PwD (M(age)=65.9;SD=13.5) took the survey. Most PwD (68%) used the platform at least once a day, primarily (1) to access the electronic client record of their home care organization (65%), (2) to communicate with their (in)formal caregivers (49%), and (3) to use a shared calendar to make/ view appointments (30%). Overall, PwD judged the platform positively regarding usability and trustworthiness and reported a positive impact on their care process and patient-caregiver communication.

Conclusion: The study shows that community-dwelling PwD can benefit from digital care platforms in several ways. Future research should focus on possible usage barriers and how to overcome these.