

5 RECOMMENDATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT OF GERONTECHNOLOGY

In the wake of outbreak of the pandemic, technology innovation and development have been further sped up to fill in gaps healthcare of services. Social distancing and limited access to healthcare services due to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in more utilisation of telehealth. It does not only minimise the spread of the virus from reduced personal contacts but also provides an effective service delivery to the elderly. While new opportunities are created in research and development in technology, gerontechnology is no exception. Gerontechnology in Hong Kong is still in a very immature development stage and more efforts are needed to enhance its utilisation.

5.1 Enhance elderly's involvement in gerontechnology

There is a need to enhance the understanding of the importance of technology in the society. Elderly community centres can organise regular events and workshops to bring up the significance of technology and usefulness of gerontechnology. Inter-generational programmes can also be organised to provide opportunities for the old and young generations to interact with each other and learn to use technology together in elderly care. The Jockey Club Smart Ageing Hub provides supportive system for the elderly to experience high-tech healthcare, such as nighttime monitoring system for demented elderly (Cheung et al., 2021). More exposure to technology can help increase the awareness, education and empowerment on elderly care and to encourage independent living and autonomy. Thus, they may have significant improvement in technology use and make good application to healthcare (Peng et al., 2018). The government should provide some incentives and financial support for the elderly to use gerontechnology. There should be some user-friendly online platforms for healthcare services or treatment for the elderly such as promising smart homes, robotics, living laboratory, etc. Doctors and patients can directly communicate with each other through systematic process automatically. The advantage is that the elderly with mobility impairment can receive treatment and services at home, thus saving time in traveling to the healthcare facilities (Lagu et al., 2013).

5.2 Increase capacity in gerontechnology research

The lack of human resources in the health and technology sector is an obstacle to enhance the capacity of gerontechnology research. Efforts should also be made to cultivate talents in this area in order to increase and retain the supply of professionals in gerontechnology. To attract the younger generations to the gerontechnology start-up field, engineering and technology programmes in universities can integrate elderly healthcare curriculum and innovations on gerontechnology. Offering a prospect of research postgraduate studies and job opportunities in research and development can also help encourage students to pursue a career in gerontechnology.

5.3 Enhance collaborations with private sector

The lack of collaboration between different stakeholders prohibits the recognition of gerontechnology. It is important to work with the private sector in order to transfer research ideas and results into service-related applications and to launch products in the gerontechnology market. There are five research and development centres in Hong Kong but the production of gerontechnology related products is very low, hindering the build-up of larger research scale and later stage of product development. This may be due to the short-term and fragmented funding available for research and for companies to continue their product enhancement and commercialise business ideas (Wong et al., 2017). Apart from providing more funding to support local entrepreneurs to start businesses, a better support system with more guidance and information can be established to enhance interaction between research

institutions and private entities to increase productivity and competition, thus sustaining long-term development of gerontechnology products.

6 CONCLUSION

Ageing population is a big social challenge that gives pressure on healthcare services and expenditure in Hong Kong. Advancement of technology improves people's quality of life. The development of gerontechnology can support elderly healthcare and promote healthy ageing. The market for gerontechnology is at an early stage in Hong Kong and the variety of concerned products is limited, mainly due to the lack of awareness of the importance of gerontechnology. In addition, lack of human resources, limited collaboration with the private sector and expensive costs hinder the utilisation of technology in elderly care. The government has invested more funding resources to support research activities and attract more venture capital funds to co-invest in innovation and technology start-ups in recent years. There are difficulties in establishing a more comprehensive ecosystem for gerontechnology in Hong Kong. But with more incentives for research investment and efforts in collaborating with different stakeholders, the market for gerontechnology in elderly care has huge potential. In a not far future, utilisation of gerontechnology can effectively help achieve healthy ageing in Hong Kong.

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