



Assistive Technology goes to Parliament at launch of ATcare



Press release: 5th March 2008

Parliamentarians, Directors of Social Care, voluntary sector organisations and academic researchers are among those who will attend the launch of ATcare in the House of Commons on Wednesday 5th March 2008. Hosted by Dr Howard Stoate MP, the event will introduce Assistive Technology (AT) – the use of advanced design and technology in equipment and aids for people with disabilities or medical conditions, to help them get on with their lives.

“There is a lot of good research taking place in very small assistive technology groups but very few have the resources or capabilities to get products to the market place. ATcare is being set-up to bridge this gap”, said Dr David Chilvers, Chief Executive NHS Innovations London.

The reception will highlight the planned opening of the ATcare Design and Development Centre in the autumn of this year. This centre will aim to act as a powerful new catalyst to get new AT products to the market. It will do so by bridging the product development gaps between university-based research, small and medium sized research-based businesses, the NHS and the market place. The Centre has received a start up grant of £2.35million from the London Development Agency.

Mary Reilly, Chair, London Development Agency, says: “Assistive technologies can make the difference between someone being able to stay in their own home and having to go into hospital or into care. Many innovators have already got the ideas to make that difference, but there are real problems turning them into products. ATcare will have the expertise and resources to bring these ideas to life.”

Assistive Technology is an important growth area in the quest to improve practical help for people with disabilities. The Department of Health Report, Research and Development Work Relating to Assistive Technology, published last year, drew attention to a number of projects which were underway and put these projects in the context of the ongoing efforts to improve opportunities for the full social inclusion of people with physical and learning disabilities and also the needs of an ageing population.¹

The Report emphasised that while a lot of research is going on more needs to be done to increase the pace of commercialising this work.

ATcare will steer the development of products such as guidance systems for people with Alzheimer's disease, better continence management products and safer white goods and other home products. It will also work with the NHS, local authorities and companies to improve the commissioning of such products and users' access to products and information about them. A selection of prototype items, including a rowing machine for paraplegics which uses a technique called functional electrical stimulation (FES) to make muscles contract to enable a regular whole body workout, will be on exhibit in Parliament during the event.

Speakers at the reception include Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP, Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Health, Baroness Campbell, an independent health and social care policy adviser, and Chair of the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) Independent Living Review Expert Panel, and Mary Reilly, Chair of the London Development Agency.

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Notes to Editors:

1. In July 2007 the Department of Health published the report *Research and Development Work Relating to Assistive Technology 2006-07*.