IS GOOGLE HOME ENOUGH?

Aims: This paper explores the opportunity of using voice activated smart assistants as a mainstream alternative to environmental control units (ECU) from the perspective of occupational therapists who are not specialised in technology.

The recent proliferation of mainstream technology which enables affordable home automation provides an opportunity for those with significant physical disability, however it is unclear if these systems are reliable enough to replace bespoke/ specialised technologies. The improvement of voice recognition technologies means that it may be possible to replace switch scanning as a primary access method. Clinicians without technical expertise may be able to work with clients to find innovate solutions. Case studies of people with cervical spinal cord injuries will be presented describing their experiences of using smart assistants as a voice activated environmental control system.

Findings: The use of voice activated smart assistants offers a flexible and lower cost alternative to traditional ECU through internet access. Users report satisfaction with new abilities to access music, news content and internet access. However, there are also reports of frustration and challenges relating to the requirement for a strong wireless connection and multiple third party components to integrate for environmental control.

This is an emerging area of assistive technology but requires some careful planning and integration with existing assistive technologies to ensure safe and effective use.