

Social media gives helping hand to fall-prone elderly

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When an elderly person suffers a fall it is in their best interests that help arrives as soon as possible, and for this reason most elderly people wear some form of alarm system that lets them contact emergency services directly when the worst happens. Therefore, with an ever ageing population, taking care of the elderly is a huge societal challenge and a priority for the EU, particularly considering injuries suffered by the elderly put a huge burden on healthcare services.

Now researchers are working on a way to connect fall alarms to the latest communications method: [social media](#).

FARESEEING is an EU-funded project that brings together 11 project

partners with the aim of getting to the bottom of how we discover when elderly people have fallen and how we can make cost savings in this area.

'The project has established the world's largest database containing information on the movements of the elderly just before and just after they suffer a fall,' says researcher Babak Farshchian from the Foundation for Scientific and Industrial Research at the Norwegian Institute of Technology (SINTEF), one of the project partners. 'This is made possible by [sensors](#) fixed to a belt worn on the hip which registers if the wearer feels faint or weak in the [legs](#).'

Taking a preventative approach, based on the data collected so far the researchers say it is possible to predict a person's next fall with greater accuracy and therefore alert him or her to sit or lie down when they could be in danger.

Social media can also intervene when [preventative measures](#) fail and an [elderly person](#) suffers a fall. In these cases the crux of the fall problem is that often it takes a long time for help to arrive.

So attempts are also being made to use technology to find ways of improving the situation. The team is working on a prototype social network that can help raise the alarm in such situations, instead of sending an alert only to the formal care services provider.

Babak Farshchian continues: 'It's easy to get the impression that Facebook is just for fun and recreational activities such as sharing photos and chatting about music, but we are only in the early stages of the use of this medium. Connecting the alarm to social media will enable potential assistance to be expanded into a 'team' in which not only the municipal services, but also children and nearest neighbours can play a part. A person who has suffered a fall is often in pain and may be in shock. If the alarm is sent to many, help can get there quicker. This is

vital both to the person who has suffered the fall, and their family.'

Ageing is one of the biggest problems facing the EU today, and dealing with it effectively is essential for fostering growth and creating jobs. It was with this in mind that the European Commission chose Active and Healthy Ageing as the first theme for its pilot European Innovation Partnership (EIP), launched in February 2011.

The aim of the Active and Healthy Ageing EIP is to ensure that care for Europe's [ageing population](#) is sustainable in the long term, with the target being an increase of two years of healthy life in the EU by 2020.

More information: www.sintef.no/home/

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