

# 'Robopets' can benefit health and wellbeing of older care home residents

May 9 2019

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Researchers found evidence that 'robopets' can provide comfort and pleasure and reduce agitation and loneliness. Funded by NIHR Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care

South West Peninsula PenCLAHRC), the study also found that robopets increase social interaction with other residents, family members and staff, often through acting as a stimulus for conversation.

The systematic review, published today in the *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, brought together evidence from 19 studies involving 900 [care home residents](#) and staff and [family members](#).

Lead author Dr. Rebecca Abbott, from the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "Although not every care home resident may choose to interact with robopets, for those who do, they appear to offer many benefits. Some of these are around stimulating conversations or triggering memories of their own pets or past experiences, and there is also the comfort of touching or interacting with the robo-pet itself. The joy of having something to care for was a strong finding across many of the studies."

Robopets are small animal-like robots which have the appearance and many of the behavioural characteristics of companion animals or pets. Five different robopets were used in the studies—Necoro and Justocat (cats), Aibo (a dog), Cuddler (a bear) and Paro (a baby seal). Some of the studies were on older people's experiences of interacting with the robopets, while others sought to measure impact on factors such as agitation, loneliness and [social interaction](#).

The researchers acknowledged that not everyone liked robopets, and recommended that specific staff training around best use may help residents get the most out of their robo-pet. Knowing whether someone likes animals, or previously had a pet of their own, is also likely to impact on how much they might engage with a robo-pet.

Co-author Dr. Noreen Orr said: "It is not always possible to have a cat or a dog come into a care home, so robopets can offer a good alternative.

Of course robopets are no substitute for human interaction, but our research shows that for those who choose to engage with them, they can have a range of benefits. A new wave of more affordable robopets may make them more accessible to care homes."

The researchers recommended that future work could examine whether the benefits are short-term or sustained over time.

Minister for Care, Caroline Dinenage said: "Modern technology has the amazing capacity to improve people's health and wellbeing and revolutionise the care they receive. Technology can never replace [human interaction](#), but this kind of research is incredibly important to help us assess its benefits."

"I want [older people](#) to have healthier, more connected and independent lives—we are investing £98 million to develop innovative new products—like robopets—services and treatments through our Ageing Society Grand Challenge."

Simon Bird, Chief Executive at Care South, which has seen success in using robopets, said: "At Care South, we are continually looking at ways to embrace technology, and evolve and enhance the care we provide to our residents offering the best quality care to help them feel relaxed and importantly, at home. We have been very impressed with the results we have seen with the introduction of the robotic dogs at Kenwith Castle and so have also introduced robotic therapy animals to our other homes. It is great to see that the research reflects our experience across our homes."

The paper is entitled 'How do 'robopets' impact the health and wellbeing of residents in care homes? A [systematic review](#) of qualitative and quantitative evidence'.

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: 'Robopets' can benefit health and wellbeing of older care home residents (2019, May 9)  
retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-robopets-benefit-health-wellbeing-older.html>

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