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Voices, Boundaries, and Belonging: Ethical Considerations of In-Home Robot Use in Dementia Care

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Objective

To examine how persons living with dementia and their care partners ethically interpret and interact with an in-home social assistive robot through the lens of person-centered dementia care (PCC)

Significance

- PCC promotes autonomy, dignity, and aging in place for older adults
- In-home assistive and socially assistive technologies are increasingly used to support dementia care
- Their use in real homes raises important ethical questions about privacy, autonomy, consent, and trust
- Generating practical and PCC-informed insights to guide ethical design and deployment

Findings

Robot support worked best when tailored to the person's routines, abilities, and preferences. Familiar voices and intuitive design increased comfort and engagement

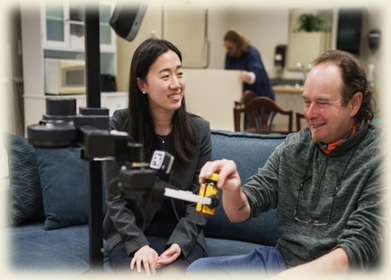
Care partner–assisted decision-making helped preserve autonomy by keeping persons living with dementia involved in choices over time

Autonomy

Personalization

Privacy & Trust

Person-Centered Care



Empowerment

Codesign & Partnership

Relationship centered

When dyads had clear options and check-ins, they felt more confident choosing what the robot should do and when to scale back

Trust increased when the robot was transparent and controllable with clear data use explanations, adjustable monitoring, and the ability to pause/opt out

Robots are not a replacement. They supported connection by reducing friction and reinforcing respectful interactions between persons living with dementia and care partners

Implementation is iterative. Care partners and the study team adjusted settings over time based on real-life experiences, making deployment more acceptable and useful

Methods

- **Design:** Descriptive qualitative design
- **Sample:** Five dyads of older adults with dementia and their primary care partners
- **Data collection:** Baseline and six monthly interviews while robots were used at home
- **Analysis:** directed content analysis guided by PCC and supplemented with conventional content analysis to identify unanticipated concepts

Conclusions and implications

- Ethical considerations call for a user-centered design and transparent communication
- Ongoing nurse-led relational support is needed
- Incorporating AI/robot ethics and PCC-based shared decision-making scenarios into nursing curricula and continuing education
- Develop a future nurse-supportable decision-making toolkit

Acknowledgements

All our participants!
Funding: 1R21EB036448

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