Understanding the opportunities and limitations of technology to support older people during the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland

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The restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland had a significant impact on the lives of older people. Lockdowns and other restrictions changed the way older people interacted with their social networks and how they accessed health and social care services. This paper presents an overview of the policy and practice context in Scotland during the pandemic alongside findings from a qualitative study about the experiences of older people in Scotland undertaken in the first half of 2021. At the onset of the pandemic in 2020 health and social care services in Scotland rapidly changed how they delivered treatment, care and support with significant increases in services delivered through telephone and video consultation. It was also evident that older people became increasingly reliant on different forms of technology to stay connected to their friends and family as well as their wider social networks. Technology provided a vital mechanism to maintain social and recreational activities. The findings presented here demonstrate the adaptability and resourcefulness of older people and their ability to learn about and utilise new technologies. However, the research also raises concerns about the limitations of technology and barriers that older people may face. The paper concludes with recommendations to support the use of technology in a way that protects older people's human rights.