

## **Alarming developments**

Nowadays people are getting older and older. Life doesn't end with retirement, instead, for many it is twenty more years to go. All the same, the older we get the more fragile we are. At some point we will need to be taken care of – the way will depend on the condition we are in. This is the good side of the demographic trends of today. But the good comes with the bad. The bad thing is that our societies won't have the resources to give us all the care we need in the way they have done so far. Old people will be too many and young people too few to provide resources and manpower to handle things the way we might expect them to be handled.

All over the industrial world the demographic trends are the same. We get older and older and already at the year 2020 about 25 % of the population will be 65 years or older. Some countries are worse off than others; Italy, for instance, will become the leader in this demographic tournament and will pass Japan in a couple of years. In Sweden the caring occupations are not attractive to young people and Statistic Sweden anticipates that there will be a shortage of about 150.000 people in the home care sector in 10 years from now. Today there are about 250.000 employees in this sector. The trend is also that we should stay put in our home when we get older and not count on a move to a nursing home with professionals taking care of our needs. The professionals will come visiting us instead. In that way the cost for care can be much cheaper, the call for nursing homes less extended and only for the ones most in need – but at the same time we can remain in our comfortable social environment. But the comfort relies on the trust that if something happens, and if we need advanced medical treatment, it will be provided for us. If there is no-one to look after us 24/7 and we live alone, as many of us will when spouses and friends are gone and other relatives live lives of their own, we must develop systems to make it safe and secure to age in place with all the services we need within reach.

In the last twenty years, old people have had safety alarms in the home connected to the POTS-network (Plain Old Telephone System). It has provided a lifeline to support services in case of emergency or need for help. You just push the button (on your wrist or around the neck) and you reach a Call Centre, which can establish a communication with you wherever you are in your apartment, through an in-built speaker and a microphone. This has been a security for both the old ones and their families. But suddenly things have changed. And it has changed in the dark. The POTS doesn't exist anymore. It has been replaced by communication through the "triple-play"-network that comes into your building. This is a digital communication network system that provides you with TV, Tele and Data communication, all through the same pipe. It is just one cable instead of two or three. Smart, yes, more efficient, yes. But the problem is that the safety alarms that exist today are based on analogue communication and they don't function properly with a digital system. So there must be an analogue/digital converter put in between the safety alarm and the network. Then it seems to work and since your old phone is analogue you will naturally get such a converter when the digital network is installed in the house so that you can use your phone as you have done before. And when you press the safety alarm button the alarm is set off as before but sometimes it loses some of its content and that might be the bit that alerts the Call Centre. So when you think you have called for help, actually you haven't because no one hears you.

This has happened in Sweden, with fatal consequences for the caller. So when we develop our new systems for health care and point our mission to the home, we must be sure to involve both carers and technicians, otherwise we run the risk of creating more problems than we solve.

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