December 28, 2011

Sensor technology helps Alberta seniors stay at home

CBC News

Cameras and sensors track Ben Krzysik as he moves around his Grande Prairie home. (CBC)

Seniors in two Alberta cities are taking part in a pilot project to see if cameras and sensors connected to computers and smartphones can help them stay in their homes longer.

"It's neat technology," Ben Krzysik said about the setup in his home in Grande Prairie.

Krzysik, 70, has multiple sclerosis and uses a wheelchair to get around.

Because of this project, nearly every room in his house is wired with cameras and sensors that track his every movement. His wife Donna can monitor him through video that is streamed online whenever she is away from home.

"I can live with the MS — it's my illness," Krzysik said. "But it makes it extremely difficult on the caregivers. It's not fair that she has to be here, or feels like she has to be here, all the time."

The sensor system can also send alarms to relatives through a smartphone or email if their loved one falls or fails to get out of bed.

"If you have parents who live in Nova Scotia, for example, but you're here in Alberta, it's a really good way to monitor how they're doing, make sure that they're up and about," said Tracy Raadik-Ruptash, the project co-ordinator for Alberta Health Services. "Making sure that they are into the fridge to get their meals."

The system has allowed Penny Landry to stay in her home. (CBC)

The system has allowed Penny Landry to continue to live independently. Landry, who has Parkinson's disease, frequently loses her balance.

"There's a lot of times that I wouldn't have been able to cope with anything without it being here," she said. "It's definitely allowed me to stay in my own home for a lot longer."

The project, which ends in March, is also being tested in Medicine Hat.

Once the funding runs out, users will have to decide whether they want to purchase the system on their own, a cost that could run several hundred dollars a month.