

Telehealth Case Study

Sector: Management of Long Term Conditions
NHS Partner: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Application: COPD Clinical Managed Service



“The results of the programme and the cost savings of over £53,000, led to the Trust continuing their programme, increasing the numbers of patients using Telehealth.”

The Programme Outline

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland have been contracting services from Alere Connected Health (Formerly Home Telehealth Limited) since March 2008. The programme, which initially started as a pilot was aimed at patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). The pilot which was led by the specialist respiratory team based at Lagan Valley Hospital Lisburn, and in partnership with Alere, ran for a period of twelve months. The aim of the programme was to identify the benefits of using Telehealth to support the reduction in avoidable hospital admissions, support better quality of life and improved disease management for patients with COPD.

Each patient was provided with a monitoring device in their home for a period of twelve weeks. The device which collected blood pressure, pulse and SpO2 measurements from the patient once a day automatically transmitted the data via the patient's telephone line to a secure server. Patient's data was initially viewed by telehealth triage nurses based at Alere's clinically led care centre in Belfast. The telehealth nurses carried out a clinical triaging process on the patient's data which was based on a clinical protocol and escalation process developed with the specialist nursing team.

The Challenges

One of the main challenges facing any health trust developing a telehealth programme is the additional workload created not just through viewing and reacting to the incoming data and alerts but also through the installation, training and maintenance of the monitoring devices themselves.

“In another pilot study currently running in Northern Ireland the Respiratory nurse has to educate the patient on how to use the equipment. Also the alerts/escalations are dealt with directly by the Respiratory Team as the company which provides the service does not provide the triage system that

40% reduction in bed days of unavoidable admissions

36 Prevented hospital admissions

Alere provides. It is proving time consuming as most patients are alerting daily at present and it is the responsibility of their team to look at these daily and triage themselves”.

One of the advantages found by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in partnering with Alere was the complete end to end Telehealth Service that Alere were able to deliver. These services included the clinical triaging of all incoming patient data, supply of all monitoring equipment, installation and de-installation services as well as ongoing maintenance.

“Alere’s team of nurses were able to interpret the vital signs. If there was a slight variation in their vital signs they telephoned the patient to establish if they had been doing anything prior to monitoring, advised them to rest and repeat their monitoring in half an hour. We were only alerted when a significant difference was noted. Due to this the patients built up a rapport with the Telehealth Nurses and overall felt they had more support”. All of the data was viewed by twelve noon which enabled the local CRT to act on any escalations and start treatment as soon as possible to avoid hospital admissions.

The Programme Results and Outcomes

The results of the initial 22 patient pilot programme led to a number of significant improvements:

- 11.77% reduction in hospital admissions
- 40% reduction in bed days of unavoidable admissions
- Average length of stay down by 2.26 days

- 25% improvement in quality of life questionnaires
- 24.53% reduction in face to face visits with patients
- 22.45% reduction in GP visits
- 36 Prevented hospital admissions

In addition to the savings to the trust, the patient also “felt empowered” and there was an overall improvement in their quality of life. Some of the comments from the patients proved to us how beneficial they found the programme.

One man described the experience “like having your GP in the room all the time.” Another patient who had been reluctant to leave her house, became more confident after her monitoring. She stated ‘once I knew my numbers were good I felt reassured, more confident and able to go out’.

Another stated that if she could afford the service, she would be more than happy to pay for it. ‘Living on my own is very hard but with this service and the help and the support from the nurses is a great reassurance’.

Other comments included ‘I felt this service should be made available to everyone as I find it invaluable in managing my condition’ and ‘I felt that the service was fantastic and if I had the opportunity to use it again I would do so’. His wife further commented that ‘this has given me a peace of mind, knowing that my husband is being very well looked after’.

Next steps and the future

The results of the programme and the cost savings of over £53,000, led to the Trust continuing their programme, increasing the numbers of patients using Telehealth and monitoring patients with other medical conditions including Diabetes and Chronic Hear Failure.



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