

Supporting carers using telehealthcare

The challenge

There are over 1.5 million people aged 60 or over providing unpaid care in the UK. Over 350,000 of these are over 75 and over 8,000 of these are aged 90 or older.¹ Older carers are often in poor health themselves, which can be exacerbated by the emotional and physical strain of caring for their loved one. How can telehealthcare provide greater support to carers, offering them peace of mind and independence, and at the same time maintain the privacy and dignity of the person they care for?

About Carecall

Carecall is a service provided by Central Essex Community Services (CECS) Community Interest Company (CIC). Carecall began as a community alarm service offered by Braintree District Council, but in 2003 it became part of the Witham, Braintree and Halstead Care Trust (WBHCT) which was established to provide an integrated approach to the delivery of health and social care services in the area. When the care trust joined with Maldon and Chelmsford PCTs to become Mid Essex PCT, Carecall was then in the unique position of being part of the NHS. As part of the CECS provider arm of NHS Mid Essex, Carecall has transferred into the CIC and remains part of the NHS economy.

Carecall has been a member of the TSA for six years and in May 2006 gained accreditation in Parts 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice. The service provides telecare systems and monitoring to over 1550 people, offering 24 hour protection from fire, flood, bogus callers and gas leaks through a range of non-intrusive telecare sensors. Should a telecare sensor be activated, an alert is sent to the monitoring centre where trained advisors take the most appropriate action, whether it be contacting a family member, neighbour, doctor, Carecall mobile Co-ordinator, or the emergency services.

The service currently sends help to on average 60 people per month who have fallen at home and asked for help by pressing their personal trigger. Carecall also works with Braintree Community Hospital, using telecare to facilitate early discharge and supporting people post discharge.



The system has given me such peace of mind, and a feeling of security. I can go out into the garden now or upstairs to do a few jobs without rushing and worrying all the time, it's made such a difference to my life. I feel a lot less stressed now, and I can get a good night's sleep without listening out all the time. **Mrs Smith**



Health and social care professionals are able to refer to the service using an online form, and the Carecall team will then undertake an assessment to establish how telecare can assist the client/patient. These assessments also take into account the needs of the carer where appropriate, helping to reduce their stress and anxiety.

¹ Older Carers in the UK, Sheffield Hallam University by Lisa Buckner and Sue Yeandle November 2005

The situation

Mr and Mrs Smith have been married for nearly 50 years and live together at home, with supportive family nearby. Mr Smith suffers from Progressive Supranuclear Palsy, a very rare condition that results in a loss of balance. He has had several falls, and although Mrs Smith managed to help him up without requiring an ambulance attending, she was finding it increasingly difficult to get on with her day to day life as she needed to continually check that her husband was safe in his chair.

The solution

Mr and Mrs Smith were put forward for the Tunstall wrist worn pager system by their Community Matron following her visit to a Carecall awareness event held at the Braintree Community Hospital, where she saw the device demonstrated.

Mr and Mrs Smith agreed to be assessed for telecare and were offered a chair occupancy sensor to go under the cushion of Mr Smith's armchair in the lounge and wrist worn pager for Mrs Smith. The sensor pad activates the wrist worn pager if Mr Smith tries to stand up and walk, putting himself at risk of falling. Mrs Smith is then able to get to Mr Smith in time to make sure he doesn't fall.

Mr and Mrs Smith have also been provided with a bed occupancy sensor which links to a vibrating pillow alert under Mrs Smith's pillow. If Mr Smith leaves his bed in the night and fails to return safely within a short time, Mrs Smith will be woken by the vibrating pillow alert, as was the case when Mr Smith woke following a bad dream and went into another bedroom where unfortunately he fell. The vibrating pillow alert woke Mrs Smith who was able to get him safely back into bed.

The outcome

Mr Smith has now started to use the chair occupancy sensor to get his wife's attention, raising himself slightly from his chair to make Mrs Smith's wrist worn pager vibrate. If the door bell rings and Mrs Smith has not heard it, or if he requires help, Mr Smith now has a simple and safe means of contacting his wife anywhere in the house or garden.

Note: Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.



Chair occupancy sensor



Bed occupancy sensor



Vibrating pillow alert



Wrist worn pager

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