

Digital devices in North East and North Cumbria care homes transforming care

As part of an innovative digital programme led by the Academic Health Science Network for the North East North Cumbria (AHSN NENC), partners and stakeholders across the region have been working together to implement new digital health solutions within care homes. Several areas within the region with over 280 care homes have been supported by the programme.

North Cumbria is the latest area to have rolled out the Digital Care Home solution from Health Call (an NHS-owned digital health company) to their 90 care homes, working in partnership with Cumbria Health on Call (CHoC), the AHSN NENC, and NENC ICS.

Care homes in North Cumbria were not connected to the necessary online systems to make referrals to the most appropriate NHS or other provider service when concerned about a resident so their staff needed to use phone calls to raise concerns. The solution helps free up care home staff from potentially lengthy phone calls, allowing them to spend more time providing care to their residents.

Each care home has been provided with equipment including a tablet device, pulse oximeter, blood pressure cuff and digital thermometer. Using this equipment, care home staff can record the resident's clinical observations in real time, calculate NEWS2 (National Early Warning Score) and complete an electronic referral using an SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment and Response) form, which is a structured form of communication that enables information to be managed more efficiently between individuals. Other functions of the current solution include a video conferencing facility. In North Cumbria, the referral function is currently available during out of hours (managed by CHoC), and the next phase of rollout will include day services, including GP practices, making referrals possible 24 hours a day.

Care homes in North Cumbria have reported improved resident experience and an increase in staff confidence when making referrals, especially when concerned about a resident.

Millfield Care Home in Keswick began using the Health Call solution earlier this year. The care home has been supported to implement the digital solution, including technical support and staff training, by local primary care out of hours provider, CHoC. Val Loan, Care Home Manager, said: "As a large, three storey care home, using the digital devices has meant that staff can complete a number of day to day tasks, including taking observations and ordering prescriptions on the go, instead of worrying about spending lots of time in an office on the phone. This frees up staff time and means they can instead focus on providing fantastic care to our residents.

"The app allows staff to input information about residents in one place and easily share information with staff from Cumbria Health on Call, which means we can monitor our residents health more efficiently. We're really excited for the next phase of the app when GPs can also access this information."

Talking about how staff have embraced using the application, Val continued:

"Like many care homes during Covid-19, we experienced staff shortages and have been fortunate to recruit new staff, including some staff who don't speak English as their first language. Staff have

reported that it has made them more confident when communicating with healthcare professionals either on the app or over the phone.

“From online demos to listening to our feedback to make improvements to the system, we’ve been supported with the implementation every step of the way. I wouldn’t like to be without it now.”

Robin Blythe, Digital Programme Manager at Academic Health Science Network for the North East and North Cumbria, said: “At the AHSN NENC our role is to work with partners across the health and care system to accelerate the scale of digital innovation to help transform patient care. It cannot be underestimated how challenging this has been for all involved under the circumstances, especially having to overcome the issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it an outstanding achievement.”

Richie McGregor, Head of Digital and Performance at Cumbria Health on Call, added: “To achieve a deployment of a healthcare app in 90 homes in 18 weeks is a remarkable effort by the entire project team given the engagement required, technical challenges, rurality and sheer volume of work needed to achieve this. A massive well done to all that were involved.”

To find out more about this programme of work to accelerate digital health solutions in care homes visit the [AHSN NENC website](#).