Using technology to help people live well with dementia

Gavin Bashar, UK Managing Director of Tunstall Healthcare

In the UK, someone develops dementia every three minutes, and the Alzheimer's Society estimates that the number of people living alone with the condition will double to 240,000 in the next 20 years.[1] Gavin Bashar, UK Managing Director of Tunstall Healthcare, explains how technology such as telecare can help people with dementia and those who care for them in a way that promotes independence as well as managing risks.

With 225,000 people developing dementia each year it has never been as important to introduce measures into people's lives to protect their dignity and safety, and improve quality of life. The pandemic has also highlighted just how important it is to find ways to deliver care and support remotely, and connect people with services and their families using technology.

Technology is crucial in enabling the delivery of care, which means people living with dementia can enjoy more independence for an extended period of time. It can also help to relieve the pressure on carers, reducing stress and enabling them to care for longer. As our social care and health systems continue to experience limited budgets and rising demand, it's becoming increasingly important that providers employ solutions which enable care to be delivered in a more effective and person-centred way.

A range of solutions

Telecare is one way of providing essential support. Systems can be tailored to the needs of the individual, helping to manage events such as falls, medication management and people leaving their home and being unable to find their way back. They can be configured to ensure help is automatically provided in the event of an emergency, 24 hours day, from a carer, response service or the emergency services as appropriate. They can also enable carers to carry out daily activities, or have uninterrupted sleep as they know they will be alerted in the event of an incident.

Telecare in practice

Many organisations across the UK are using technology as part of services to help support people with a wide range of needs. The Hertfordshire Telecare Service supports almost 4,000 people in Hertfordshire to live more independently, many of whom have dementia.

Norman* has vascular dementia, and lives alone, although his daughter lives nearby. Technology is helping him to remain safe and at home, and provide reassurance to his daughter. Unobtrusive telecare sensors in his home will automatically raise an alarm at the 24 hour monitoring centre if they detect floods, fires or carbon monoxide in Norman's home, and property exit sensors have also been fitted which will notify the centre if an external door is opened. A specially trained operator at the centre can then talk to Norman through the speaker on the Lifeline unit to assess the situation, and make sure Norman is okay. If the operator is unable to get a response, they can contact Norman's daughter, or the British Red Cross Responder Service so they can check on him.

Norman's daughter has also given her father a GPS tracker device, which enables her to locate him should he leave home and be unable to find his way back. Together with the Telecare Service, this has already helped Norman to be found quickly and helped back to his home, avoiding him being at risk. It also means that Norman is able to remain in his own home, rather than being admitted to residential care for his own safety.

Integration is key

Although technology is a fantastic resource when it comes to supporting people with dementia, no matter where they live, it should never be seen as a means replace human interaction and care. Technological solutions should always be connected to the wider cycles of care within housing, health and social care, but there is no doubt that as in most other areas of life, technology will have an increasing role to play how people can live well with dementia.

Source 1: **https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2019-05-15/lonely-future-120000-people-dementia-living-alone-set-double-next-20-years**