CARERS UK
the voice of carers

equal
partners
BRIEFING



Spotlight on… Telecare

Summary

Telecare is a technology based system designed to help older people and those with long term needs, remain safe within their own homes, and support carers. The sensors automatically alert a 24 hour response centre or carer if there is a problem in the home, such as flooding or a gas leak. The sensors can also pick up if the person has a problem, such as

• Falling and unable to summon help

• Walking about outside the home and endangering themselves.

Despite Government funding for local authorities to develop telecare, awareness among the general public is still relatively low. This briefing explores this technology, how carers can get telecare support, and what needs to happen to make this technology more widely available.

The carer's story…

" Sarah, like 50% of people with learning disabilities, also has epilepsy. Sarah's mother, Joan, used to sleep in the same room as her daughter due to the risk of tonic clonic seizures, which could sometimes occur up to five times in one night. Joan couldn't get a good night's sleep due to the constant worry of what would happen if she didn't wake up. Joan had an epilepsy sensor fitted in Sarah's bed, allowing her to return to her own room for the first time in 15 years, reassured that she would be alerted if Sarah needed her help. "
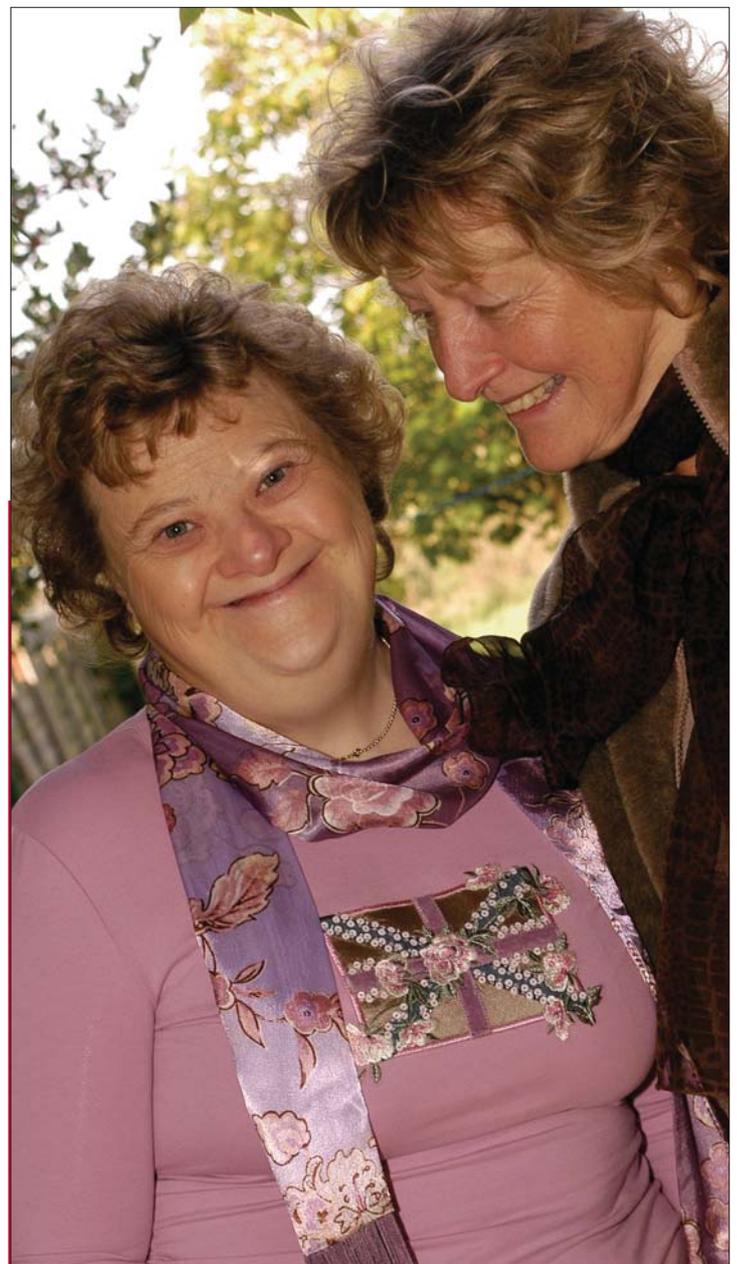
What is telecare?

Telecare consists of various sensors placed around the home. If a sensor detects an incident it will raise an alert and enable appropriate action to be taken.

Every sensor is linked to a home hub – if it detects something unusual it will trigger an alarm and send an emergency call through the telephone line to a monitoring centre which is staffed 24 hours a day. The trained operators will then find out what the problem is and if necessary send out appropriate help. This could involve contacting the emergency services, the mobile response service or a friend or relative which the person has nominated.

Many areas already have community alarm schemes, one of the simplest telecare products. Other areas are starting to link emergency schemes based on a similar premise of giving the disabled person and carer more independence. In Greenwich telecare staff support the emergency scheme by checking up on the person if carers are unavailable. Telecare is only an extension of these kinds of schemes – accompanied by the appropriate controls and accreditation it offers disabled people and carers the chance to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Who can telecare help?

Telecare is not right for all disabled people, but it could help some people who are physically frail and/or have a cognitive impairment (including dementia), learning disabilities, are at risk of harm and identified as needing telecare following hospital discharge or a fall or as a preventive measure.

"My son who has a learning disability is 13 and I am considering giving him a mobile phone so that he can contact us when required – this will increase his independence and self-esteem for example by using public transport on his own. My father in law had a pendant alarm, this gave reassurance that if he fell, help could be at hand and enabled my wife and I to go out to work and carry on a normal social life in the village."

Benefits to carers

"Our disabled son sleeps downstairs. We have no way of knowing if he feels ill, falls or needs anything."

According to Carers UK research 96% of carers worry about something unexpected happening to the person they care for when they are not around.

"I do not go out a lot – if I do, I get back early to allow for traffic. I do not sleep very well, constantly worry about what would happen to my husband if I was ill."

The pressure of caring for someone else can be very demanding, physically and mentally. Amongst the stresses and strains of looking after someone, carers often forget to concentrate on their own health and well-being. According to Carers UK research, people who provide high levels of care are twice as likely to be permanently sick or disabled.

What's on offer? Examples of devices which are helping carers

Home Alert Pager
Provides additional peace of mind and reassurance to carers by immediately notifying them of alarm calls from telecare sensors when they are at home or in the garden.

Bed/Chair Occupancy Sensor
A specially designed pressure pad which fits under the mattress and gently turns on the bedside light when a person leaves their bed at night, lowering it automatically upon their return. It can also be used with a timer which will raise an alarm if they fail to return safely to bed after a short time. It may also be used to notify a carer that someone has failed to go to bed by a certain time, or failed to get up in the morning after a particular time. A similar device is available for use with chairs and wheelchairs.

Medication Reminder/Dispenser
Provides effective solutions to support medication compliance. Can be used to provide other reminders if required.

Community [Social] Alarms
Almost every local authority will have an existing Community Alarm Scheme, usually run by the housing department of the local council. These are often known as "panic buttons" or "lifelines" and are aimed at vulnerable people who live alone. Many Carer Emergency Schemes tap into this existing resource, by using the call centre infrastructure to register the carer's emergency plan.

Case study:
TATE Project
(Through Assistive Technology to Employment)

TATE has been helping people with learning disabilities to take up jobs by providing them with equipment, skills and training. It installs technology in the home to make everyday living easier for individuals and their carers. Examples:

• Ian does not enjoy showering. TATE installed a 'disco shower'. When he turns on the shower, his favourite music plays and lots of lights flash, making it an enjoyable experience.

• Clare has trialled a smart microwave oven which reads bar codes from prepared meals. This enables Clare to prepare meals independently.

TATE also provides dedicated training and computer programmes to help people with managing budgets, health and safety at work and other important skills, so that they can take up jobs and live independent lives.

www.tateproject.org.uk

Telecare is intended to compliment the care given by a carer, by enabling the cared for person to have more time to themselves, and give the carer freedom to be away from the home, safe in the knowledge that if anything happens to their family member or friend, they will be notified immediately.

Telecare can also be used to prevent accidents thereby helping the person to stay at home for longer, and avoiding the disruption and discomfort of admission to hospital.

How do carers obtain a telecare package in their home?

Carers and the person they care for can be referred to telecare by

• Social services

• Health staff such as community nurses

• Housing officers from district councils and housing associations

The cared for person will then be assessed by either Social Services staff or an Occupational Therapist, and if their needs meet Social Services criteria they could receive the telecare service as part of their care package.

Case study:
Newham

In Newham, every household over 75 can now get a free telecare package. The original pilot study showed real benefits for individuals and their carers. One carer said, *"I think it helps me more than my mum, I feel I can relax a bit more, and I am not so worried when the 'phone rings in the evening, that I might have to dash out to see my mum."*

Case study:
West Lothian

West Lothian has supplied 3000 households with a package of six sensors consisting of a home alarm unit, smoke detectors, movement sensors, temperature extreme sensor and a flood detector. Additional equipment is available such as property exit sensor and bed sensor. The results have been extremely positive:

• The numbers of people awaiting hospital discharge has fallen from 67 in April 2000 to 0 to date.

• The average stay in a care home has fallen from 36 months to less than a year for recent admissions over the period.

What are the costs of telecare packages?

The technology is very cost effective and can range from £4 to £20 per week. The Government is very committed to making telecare available. It has given local authorities £80 million over the next two years to help pay for telecare technology. This does not cover all the costs of providing telecare packages but is intended to help local authorities set up programmes.

Local authorities can use additional funding to deliver telecare such as the Disabled Facilities Grant, 'extra care' housing, and/or joint fund with local health, housing and third sector organisations. There is a real incentive for local areas to invest in this new technology as it is cheaper in the long term than conventional homecare [see Northamptonshire case study.]

Some local authorities have been quick to see the benefits of telecare and have invested heavily in making it available free of charge to all residents who need it.

Individual costs

The cost of telecare varies across the UK. In some areas local authorities are subsidising telecare packages for people who are assessed and meet the eligibility criteria. Other local authorities charge for this service – a typical council in the North West charges £8.86 per week for telecare.

For individuals wanting to buy telecare packages and equipment,

there is a vast range of information and products available – eg on the Internet. The Disabled Living Foundation provides free, impartial advice about all types of disability products and equipment for older and disabled people and their carers.

In addition, Tunstall, the leading provider of telecare products, can provide details of the local telecare contact in your area. Both organisations' contact details and other helpful sources of information are included in the 'Signposting' section on the back page.

Does the case for telecare stand up?

Does it work?

There is increasing evidence that telecare works – illustrated by the local authorities which have developed packages.

Case study:
Northamptonshire 'Safe at home'

Northamptonshire County Council provided over 50 devices to people with dementia and their carers over two years and monitored their progress:

• The reliability and effectiveness of the devices were checked every three months, and over 90% worked perfectly after six checks.

• Fewer people spent less time in hospital, residential or nursing care, resulting in a saving of £1.5m.

• Carers were asked about the various problems of caring – such as interrupted sleep, difficulties coping, inability to have a holiday and feeling frustrated. At the end of the project they reported significant improvements in most of these areas.

Availability

The range of telecare services available differs across the UK. Despite the Government having provided funding, it is estimated that only around half of councils have effective telecare services over and above a basic alarm service.

Training

In order to provide an efficient telecare service, councils need to train their staff properly so that they can monitor the sensors, and deliver the appropriate response if an alarm is triggered. Telecare also requires dedicated training for people using the technology and their carers.

"As the fire chief commented when they were automatically called to our neighbours 'wired up' home for the umpteenth false alarm "it's a good way of doing our fire drills for the month."

example, if some staff time can be freed up through the use of telecare, it may be possible to schedule regular reassurance visits in their place.

Unease is often expressed about "cameras and alarms taking away privacy." This clearly throws up complicated moral and ethical issues which need to be fully explored before the technology expands further. The rights of older and disabled people need to be fully considered in this debate.

Final words

Carers UK believes the case for telecare is overwhelming. It carries real benefits for many older or disabled people offering them independence and giving their carers peace of mind and confidence to have a life outside caring.

Action points for carers

Carers UK has been working with Tunstall to provide information to carers. Kevin Alderson, Public Sector Policy Director at Tunstall, believes "many people could see their lives turned around by this new technology." He explains what carers can do to influence the telecare debate and enable more people to benefit.

"Carers can be really strong advocates for telecare and can make a difference to local services. In some areas there is a blockage on resources, but there is also a 180 degree turnaround in the way that services are delivered – carers are now the consumers.

✔ Carers can easily put their local services to the test with a phone-call to see what their local authority funds. Using the examples of neighbouring/ proactive areas is a powerful case for their council to act.

✔ Clearly there is a need for training and for standards to accompany the expansion of telecare. Carers could also have a major impact in lobbying for the controls to be implemented to give the consumer important protection.

✔ Make sure you've got the facts at your fingertips – there is plenty of information available for carers. A good starting point is the brochure which Tunstall has produced – *Support for Carers.*"

"Too many elderly people are isolated and alone. They receive a weekly or fortnightly visit to dump off their meals for the week/fortnight and see nobody until the next visit. Telecare cannot replace human contact."

Ethical issues

There are strong ethical issues that need to be considered in making telecare packages widely available. Technology and care services should be an asset for older and disabled people and enable them to lead more fulfilling lives, not simply try to keep them safe.

There are rightly concerns over how and when the technology is used. Many people are worried that the technology could expand into a replacement for human services.

Telecare isn't intended to replace face to face contact, but it can enable the effective redeployment of staff resources. For

Signposting

Terminology
unpicking the jargon

Telecare is the continuous, automatic and remote monitoring of real time emergencies and lifestyle changes over time in order to manage the risks associated with independent living. *Examples: Equipment to assist in reducing accidents and incidents in the home, community (social) alarms*

Telemedicine is the practice of medical care using interactive audio visual and data communications. Telemedicine is therefore essentially 'doctor-to-doctor', with the patient somewhere in the system, and typically involves consultations with specialists at a distance.

Telehealth is the consistent, reliable and accurate remote monitoring of a patients vital signs through the use of easy to use equipment that healthcare professionals can customize to each patient, enabling day to day individual care according to need and the self management of one's condition.
Examples: Blood pressure monitoring, Asthma monitoring

Assistive technology – any product or service designed to enable independence for disabled people and older people.
Examples: Hoists, scooters, grab rails.

References

1 *Back Me Up*, Carers UK 2005

2 *In Poor Health*, Carers UK 2004

3 Tunstall, Telecare conference 07

4 *Carers, Employment & Services – time for a new social contract?* Carers UK 2007

CARERS UK
the voice of carers

About Carers UK

Carers UK is the voice of carers. Carers provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner. Carers give so much to society yet they experience ill health, poverty and discrimination because they provide care. Carers UK campaigns to end this injustice.

CARERS UK EQUAL PARTNERS helps carers to make their voice heard and improve local services. Equal Partners gives you the facts, skills and back-up to achieve change locally; you'll provide Carers UK with the evidence to strengthen our campaigns.