

Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



About Victoria Hospital

Victoria Hospital is part of the Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which also includes two community and three elderly rehabilitation hospitals, the National Artificial Eye Service and Blenheim House Child Development Centre. The Victoria Hospital has a dedicated

The Problem

Following a stroke, it is not uncommon for the patient to develop swallowing difficulties and require an assessment by a specialist SLT practitioner. With no rapid response team, the Victoria Hospital SLT team wanted to find a way to assess patients quickly if they got into difficulty when eating or drinking when out in the community, lower the number of hospital admissions, which are often distressing and not always required, and reduce the time and costs associated with home visits.

The Solution

With funding provided through the North West IT Innovations Programme, a pilot project was run as 'test of change' concept, to see how video technology could be used to help modernise SLT and other services.

One of the biggest challenges historically had been proving rapid response high quality care across a large geographical area. The project initially worked with three nursing homes located away from the main hospital site, deploying Polycom technology to provide very high quality audio and video links.

Staff in the nursing homes were trained to use the technology on remote devices, the solution then allowing nursing home staff to communicate directly with specialists at Victoria Hospital via high definition audio and video link, allowing rapid and effective remote assessment of the patient.

Speech & Language Therapy (SLT) department which provides support for a significant number of patients each year across the region, with sessions ranging from swallowing assessment to group communication therapy.

The SLT team has fully embraced the trial, finding it an incredibly useful tool for providing fast and convenient care. Many of the patients who have been involved in the trial are elderly and they also appear grateful they don't need to leave their nursing home in order to be assessed by a specialist.

Utilising the solution to communicate with staff at the nursing homes also allows the SLT team to provide a remote rapid response solution, which offers support to both patients and care workers, and allows easier follow up and tracking of patient progress.

The solution provides a high degree of diagnostic clarity required when remotely assessing patients.

“The video solution offers great diagnostic clarity through high quality video and audio links complete with zoom, pan and tilt capability.”

— **Veronica Southern**

Principle Speech & Language Therapist

“Hospital visits are often distressing for elderly patients, but with this telehealth technology we’re able to provide our patients with timely support and a high level of care, while reducing costly hospital admissions and time consuming home visits by clinicians.”

— **Veronica Southern**
Principle Speech &
Language Therapist

Benefits

The trial is still in place and a detailed report of the full benefits has yet to be published. However, the benefits in terms of time and cost savings are already evident. SLTs are able to reduce time spent travelling and performing administration tasks, enabling them to see a much greater number of patients and spend more time on vital work. The solution reduces the number of hospital admissions, which all contributes to both time and cost savings.

For example, each SLT home visit costs around £110 to deliver, and travelling time could take over an hour and a half, making home visits both time consuming and costly. If this is can be replaced with a 30 minute remote assessment via video link there are huge benefits to be gained for everyone.

Aside from an operational cost saving, there is significant benefit from reducing the number of hospital admissions required to treat SLT patients. The video technology offers a very sustainable solution, allowing a much higher number of patients to be seen in a short space of time and providing a rapid response service to those in need of an emergency assessment, helping to significantly reduce the number of hospital admissions required.

Next Steps

Longer term the SLT team is looking to continue to use video as a service to deliver fast and effective assessments, and to see this technology benefit other health professionals and their patients. It is also looking at other ways of deploying the service, using mobile devices as well as computer monitors.

Key successes

- 1 Operational cost reduction
- 2 Remote assesment and training
- 3 Reduction in the number of hospital admissions
- 4 Rapid response for emergency assesments

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