

Report

Sheffield NHS wins plaudits for telehealth project which halves hospital admissions

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Sheffield NHS Primary Care Trust (PCT) has won the regional finals of the NHS Health and Social Care Awards in the category for Innovative Information & Communication Technology as a result of its innovative deployment of telehealth to monitor people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Sheffield PCT used Genesis monitors from Tunstall to tackle the issue of COPD in the community by monitoring patients in their own homes, which saw a massive improvement in their quality of life.

The telehealth monitors were given to 30 high-risk patients for duration of five months, during which time they measured their own vital signs including heart rate, weight, blood pressure and oxygen saturation levels. The monitor is also capable of asking a series of clinical questions to further determine their current condition. Once measured the data is transmitted to the public health development respiratory nurses and/or the COPD nurses office within secondary care. The COPD nurse triages her 'virtual ward' against agreed criteria and applies an order of priority to the visitation schedule, whilst those patients in need of urgent treatment are referred to the appropriate care facility.

Sheffield's innovative approach to managing the condition saw COPD-related hospital admissions dramatically decrease by 50%, saving the PCT between £30,000 to £40,000, which allowed them to purchase more monitors.

During the pilot, home visits by community COPD nurses were also reduced by an astonishing 80%, cutting travel costs and enabling healthcare staff to prioritise their workload, which ensured the most effective use of their time.

Sue Thackray, deputy head of development nursing for Sheffield PCT, said: "The PCT has worked very hard to make the telehealth project a success and has had a tremendous amount of support from both clinicians and other parties within primary and secondary care. We have also had a great deal of support from Tunstall, who helped ensure the project ran smoothly."

The success of the project led to the Sheffield PCT being selected for the Innovative Information and Communications Technology award category, which recognises the development of innovative applications of information and communications technology that improve the delivery of services for patients, service users or carers.

Judges chose Sheffield PCT's project as it was developed as a result of an identifiable problem, demonstrated a successful approach to change management and adoption, and showed an ability to integrate the solution into existing systems and architectures.

"Winning an award run by the NHS is a huge achievement for us and it helps raise the profile of the benefits of telehealth locally, within South Yorkshire and The Humber, and nationally too," said Sue Thackray. "The award recognises the many benefits telehealth delivers; it endorses our proactive and innovative approach to caring for patients with COPD and meeting the challenge of COPD in the community. It also further strengthens our plans to roll out telehealth across a number of other long-term conditions such as heart failure within the community."