Sketching out telehealth solutions in Scotland

Janne Rasmussen, European Engagement Manager, and Michelle Brogan, Service Development Manager, provide a snapshot of their work with United4Health and NHS Scotland to strengthen the patient experience using telehealth solutions.

NHS 24 BEGAN a partnership with the United4Health Consortium in 2013. This partnership aims to use telemonitoring solutions in Scottish healthcare to enable nearly 8,000 patients to have a central role in managing their chronic diseases and long-term conditions (LTC).

The overarching goal driving the partnership is to shift the predominance of a deficit-based culture across health and care services towards a more asset-based approach, promoting self-management and behaviour change. This is ambitious, but it is a necessary approach to help address the increasing global societal challenges of demographical change and social isolation facing healthcare providers working with LTC.

United4Health
The United4Health Consortium aims to evaluate and deploy at-scale innovative and targeted telehealth services in 14 regions across Europe. Each telehealth service’s purpose is to transform patients’ experience and give them a central role in the management of their own condition in a way that is convenient to their daily lives by the use of remote monitoring.

Why NHS 24?
NHS 24 – a health board that provides 24-hour telephone health advice and information services for people in Scotland – has been appointed by the Scottish Government to provide leadership, programme management and financial governance for United4Health to the nation. Scotland is the perfect partner for United4Health as it is the only country in Europe that has both a national organisation with a specific remit for telehealth and a National Delivery Plan for telehealth and telecare.

Focus areas include: life-long management of diabetes; short-term follow-up after hospital discharge for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patients; remote monitoring of congestive heart failure; home-monitoring of patients with hypertension.

Creating a knowledge base
In order for telehealth solutions to work, it is essential that healthcare providers share and adopt innovative health and care service models. Therefore, United4Health is working to amalgamate data across its 14 pilot sites to provide results on telehealth services as a whole. This also enables United4Health to compare results at the pilot site level to examine how the same intervention has a different impact on local healthcare delivery organisations. United4Health will also focus on economic and organisation assessment of telehealth services.

Capturing experiences and results
An increasingly solid evidence base is emerging that indicates telemonitoring can be used effectively and efficiently to respond to the call for improved care, in particular for those with chronic conditions. A portfolio of projects, such as the Telescot programme in Scotland, have enabled NHS 24 and the Scottish Centre for Telehealth and Telecare to build up expertise and capture important insights in clinical outcomes, economic and organisational aspects as well as the patient experience.

Specific examples of demonstrated impact come from the partnership area NHS Ayrshire & Arran. This local area is a fully integrated Scottish partner in United4Health. Since its integration, NHS Ayrshire & Arran has seen a 26 per cent reduction in General Practitioner (GP) appointments, 70 per cent reduction in emergency admissions to hospitals and an 86 per cent reduction in on-call contact for the locality areas. Additionally, local health service costs have decreased and patients are citing increased understanding of health conditions and happiness with fewer GP appointments and hospital visits. However, the most significant benefit has been empowering patients to self-manage their condition by helping them recognise their symptoms and giving them the confidence to go about their daily lives.

Integrated telehealth service solutions
There are a number of different integrated telehealth service solutions being implemented across the three clinical grouping within United4Health in Scotland. One technology – which is already a key component of the Scottish diabetic service – is My Diabetes My Way (MDMY). It is an interactive educational web-based application designed to assist patients with their life-long management of diabetes. MDMY helps with self-management, health coaching and self-monitored blood glucose. Both patients and healthcare professionals (HCPs) can access the information. For example, a patient can send information from a home device, and a HCP can immediately access it. This gives HCPs the opportunity to provide feedback and advice or arrange a clinical visit.

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