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Conference Abstract

Using technology to support people at risk of falling

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Abstract

In 2012 it was estimated 800 people fell daily in the West Midlands and fall detectors were an under-used resource. A fall detector does not prevent a fall but sends an alert so that someone knows a person has fallen making a difference to living independently by restoring confidence. There is a direct correlation between recovery and how long people lie on the floor after a fall; the speedier the response, the lower the risk of hospital admission and the shorter the length of hospital stay and subsequent support requirements on discharge.

The Health Design & Technology Institute, Coventry University and the West Midlands Regional Telehealthcare Network and Warwickshire PCT were funded by NHS West Midlands to evaluate the use of fall detectors within the West Midlands. The initial phase of the project used rapid appraisal techniques for swift assessment of local perceptions of issues about the use of fall detectors across the region. Evaluation included;

- literature review and market appraisal of existing fall detector technology/products
- focus groups with telehealthcare leads and informal carers
- service experience of 20 people issued with fall detectors as part of their care package through interviews
- collecting data from existing sources about the range of fall detectors used and a review of fall care pathways across the region.

From this project we have a clearer understanding from people who wear fall detectors, their carers and the staff who support them about why, when and where they are currently used and more importantly, how they could be deployed to maximum effect within a falls care pathway. The project identified;

- a lack of knowledge and low public and practitioner awareness was a barrier to the use and adoption of fall detectors

- a need for sharing of best practice across the region to develop services further
- fall detection is only part of the spectrum of falls interventions required to support people at risk of falling and there was a need to consider AT more widely in falls prevention and response.
- improved design of fall detectors was needed to broaden their appeal to people who could benefit from wearing them. The dialogue has been opened with companies that design, manufacture and supply equipment.

The second phase of the project is nearly complete. This aims to raise the profile of assistive technology and falls amongst the general public and staff in health and social care through production of resources including:

- a leaflet to promote the use of technology in falls prevention
- a good practice guide on the successful use of fall detectors supported by digital case studies
- a falls prevention smart phone app containing advice for carers to support self care through awareness raising and access to low level technologies readily available in the high street/ internet
- identification and sharing of good practice, service innovation and whole system thinking within falls prevention and response services across the region through an in-depth case study approach promote recovery, with the flexibility to be tailored to support individuals with other long term conditions.

Keywords:

falls, telecare, user involvement, innovation

Presentation available at: <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/events/third-annual-international-congress-telehealth-and-telecare>