Conference Abstract

Improving communication to effectively prevent and manage chronic illnesses in old age

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Abstract

Right now, prevention and management of chronic illness is unsustainable. 70% of the NHS Health and Care budget is spent on patients with long term conditions (LTC). 40% of all over 65s have one or more LTCs. It is incredibly difficult to deliver care to this demographic, in fact, it's twice as expensive. Improving communication and reducing isolation in old age is the key to effectively preventing and managing LTCs. 40% of older people say they are lonely and this makes them more likely to develop depression, stroke, Alzheimer's and cardiovascular disease. It is clear that connecting care services and family members to these patients underpins this prevention. Furthermore, managing conditions can only be effective if isolated patients can be easily contacted.

Care providers face a number of difficulties in combatting LTCs in old age; managing numerous health and social care services, high costs of delivering care at home and addressing patients' technical ability. Delivering care remotely forms the foundation of any sustainable service. The solution is using technology that older people are familiar with via a system that permits multiple organisations to provide remote care through a single platform.

Saltbox (a registered charity) and Stoke CCG have collaborated to address this very need. Saltbox offers a befriending service in which befrienders make phone calls 3-4 times a week to isolated older people whilst GPs use a combination of phone calls and house visits. They have implemented SpeakSet. For older people, SpeakSet is an accessible video calling service that works on any TV. It is operated by an easy-to-use remote control. For care providers, this system is accessed via PC or laptop.

All patients that have been offered the system have accepted it and 100% of video calls have been rated "better than a phone". Befrienders have said they were "able to make a lot more observations about the wellbeing of clients than would be possible over the phone." Increased wellbeing through reduced isolation has been shown through use of this system. This is due to high user engagement through meaningful communication to friends and family members as well as the rest of the patient's support network.

The system has been created with a focus on user-centric design. At each stage of development, older people and their support networks have been included. TV is a familiar interface to all whereas tablets and laptops were rejected due to complexity. This attention to detail has resulted in patients asking "when can I throw my phone away?"

In conclusion, improving communication and reducing isolation has made it possible to deliver care in a sustainable manner. This has been achieved by Saltbox and Stoke CCG implementing a video calling solution that is truly innovative in its accessibility to both older people and care services.

Keywords

ageing; communication; chronic illness; isolation; video calling

PowerPoint presentation:

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