

# Using telehealth to avoid hospital admissions and improve the quality of life for people with dementia in residential care homes



## Background

Compared with other London boroughs, Croydon has a higher number of people with dementia; currently around 3,300. This figure is expected to rise to 4,500 by 2025 as the population ages. Croydon also has more care homes than any other London borough, with approximately 180, of which half completely or partly specialise in the care of people aged over 65 or people with dementia.<sup>1</sup>

Among people living in care homes, hospital admissions for avoidable conditions are 30% higher for people with dementia. An estimated 30% of older people in hospital have dementia<sup>1</sup> and they are often admitted as a result of avoidable conditions such as dehydration, urinary tract infections and complications as a result of long-term conditions. Once in hospital, people with dementia stay longer and have poorer outcomes than those without dementia.<sup>2</sup>

The London Borough of Croydon and NHS South West London have a dementia strategy in place, which aims to improve support for people with dementia and their carers, helping to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. This includes evaluating innovative strategies for delivering better care to people living in residential homes, such as introducing telehealth.

## What we did

One of the reasons people with dementia are more frequently admitted to hospital is that they are often unable to communicate that they feel unwell and therefore their condition may not be identified until it reaches a more advanced stage.

Implementing a system of health monitoring for people with dementia living in care homes could help to address the challenges care teams face in gathering reliable information on a regular basis from people living with dementia.

Following a NHS innovation grant, Croydon Council has been piloting the development and use of the Multi user telehealth system in two of its care homes. The purpose of the project was to assess the benefits for both the care home resident and the commissioner from the continuous monitoring of the clients health and well being while remaining in their normal environment. This should lead to, more informed and better-managed care rather than unplanned and emergency interventions such as hospital admissions.

“Patients with dementia have special needs when it comes to healthcare. They are often not able to tell the care staff that they are ill or able to explain why or how they feel unwell. Telehealth is a great way of picking up health and well being issues at an early stage.

**Brian Longman, Telecare & TeleHealth Lead, Croydon Care Solutions, London Borough of Croydon**

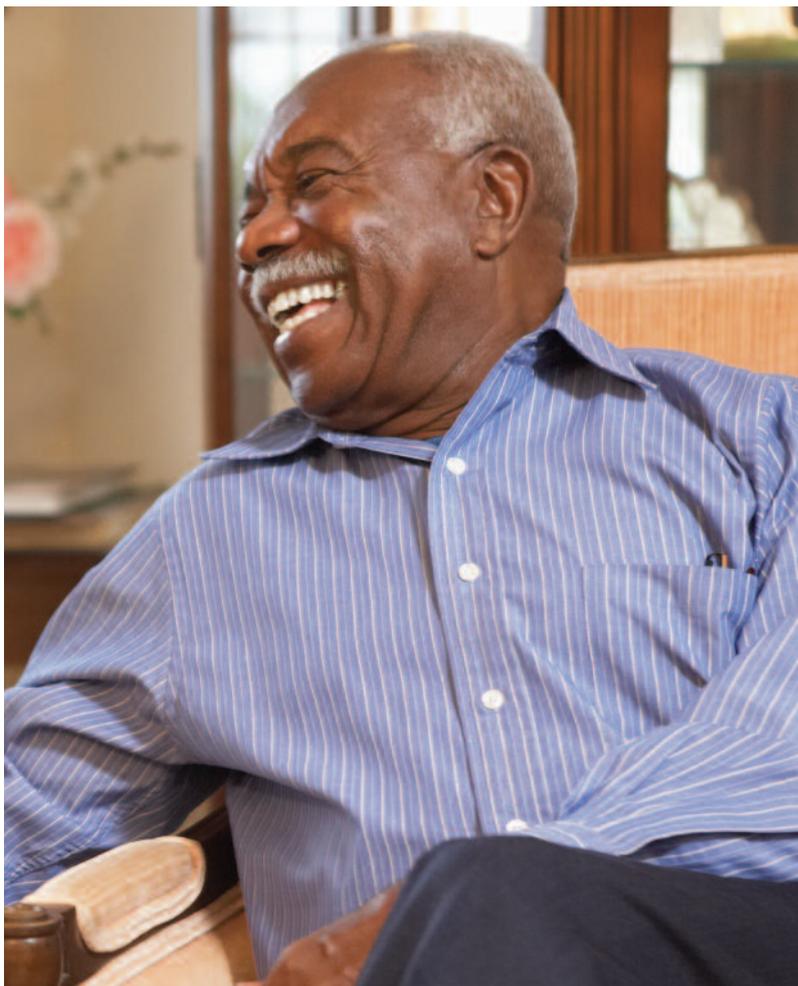
<sup>1</sup>Croydon Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011/12, Key Topic 3 Dementia  
<sup>2</sup>Care Quality Commission State of Care Report 2012/2013

## What is myclinic?

myclinic is a portable tablet based multi-user telehealth system which can be used by multiple patients in a communal location, such as in a care home.

Following a review of the client's health history and current health needs, including the issue of consent and capacity, the clinician will create an individual telehealth monitoring plan for each user. The plan will include the daily recording of the client's vital signs as appropriate via a range of Bluetooth peripheral medical devices e.g. temperature, blood pressure, blood oxygen levels and weight. In addition, and with the support of the local care staff, a combination of client relevant individual health questions will be answered and recorded via the touch sensitive screen of the myclinic tablet.

This information is then securely transmitted to a central triage monitoring centre. If a user's readings are outside of the preset limits set for them in their care plan, markers are raised on the triage system and appropriate action can be quickly taken, enabling early intervention. This data can then be accessed and reviewed either by the onsite care team or other assigned health professionals associated with the client care.



“ At the outset, the residents' past medical history indicated very few active health problems and only a few of the residents have COPD or heart failure. However by the routine monitoring of vital signs and using the bespoke questionnaire we have now established a baseline for every resident being monitored. A major benefit for the use of this technology is that it helps raise the awareness of the care team to identify symptoms of delirium or other health problems and enables staff to identify residents 'at risk' and alerts them to a change in condition. This enables residents to receive an intervention in a timely fashion. The acute onset of symptoms are frequently 'masked' in this population and telehealth provides objective observational data to highlight early warning symptoms related to acute episodes in older people.

We have done a lot of joint learning that crosses professional boundaries during the implementation of this project. This is been a mainly positive experience from my perspective and I believe that using this supports the care staff to take an active role in monitoring and decision making regarding the health of residents in their care.

**Patricia Robinson, Nurse Consultant for Long Term Conditions,  
Croydon Health Services NHS Trust**

## Case study

### Heavers Court Care Home

Heavers Court is a London Borough of Croydon purpose-built dementia care home and dementia resource centre. The 60 bed care home facility staffed by Care UK uses the portable myclinic tablet to provide monitoring and potentially early indication of any deterioration in health and well-being of residents.

Twelve residents with later stage dementia are currently using the telehealth system, care home staff having agreed with their family members that it is in their best interest to do so. Each morning a member of the care staff using the myclinic tablet will record the residents' vital signs and complete their bespoke health questions.

This information is then securely transmitted to Croydon's Community Matrons technical triage team. Any readings which are not within the parameters set for that individual resident will be flagged up to the care home manager, who can then take appropriate action. Heavers Court has its own dedicated GP who can visit residents if required, and who can also remotely access the telehealth system and view the readings for each individual resident to help inform the care planning process.

“ The myclinic technology has provided the care staff in Heavers Court with a better understanding and awareness of just how our residents' health changes. By alerting staff of health related issues at an early stage it helps minimise unwanted hospital admissions and improves our quality of care.

**Manager, Heavers Court, Care UK**

**Katie Hersey, Team Leader,  
Heavers Court with myclinic**



## Results

The myclinic solution has proven to be an effective support system, helping to provide person-centred care and improving quality of life by detecting possible health issues at an early stage.

Early concerns that residents with dementia may be stressed and resist having their vital signs taken have proven to be unfounded. It is thought because the myclinic is very portable and taken to the resident, rather than the resident having to go to a separate area of the care home to use it, residents are relaxed and accepting of the system. Telehealth monitoring has also become another opportunity for social interaction between staff and residents and is valued by both parties.

Staff at Heavers Court enjoy using the myclinic, and report that it has helped them to better understand the residents' health needs and has empowered them to help manage their care more proactively.

The enthusiasm displayed by the care home staff for the project was a key factor in the successful development of a bespoke question tree for the residents with dementia; this is helping to detect signs of poor health at an early stage, enabling early intervention and treatment and in some cases preventing hospital admission. Further bespoke question trees for residents with dementia are under development including the monitoring of any side effects from changes to medication.

The use of the myclinic system is currently being expanded to support more residents in the care home with a wider range of long-term health conditions. The ultimate aim of the project is to extend the service to all care homes in the borough and to offer the use of the myclinic system to other people visiting care homes, e.g. via day care or lunch clubs.



t: 01977 661234  
f: 01977 662570  
e: [enquiries@tunstall.com](mailto:enquiries@tunstall.com)  
w: [tunstall.com](http://tunstall.com)

Tunstall Healthcare (UK) Ltd,  
is a member of the Tunstall Group