

# How technology can increase independence and offer comfort to carers

**Tracey Hipkiss, Clinical Applications Specialist, World Alzheimer's Month**

*September marks both World Alzheimer's Month and Vascular Disease Awareness Month. Tracey Hipkiss, Clinical Applications Specialist, tells us more about how technology can help to support people to live well for longer with conditions such as these.*

Community alarms, scheme systems such as Communicall and telecare have long offered support for people with a range of conditions and care needs, giving reassurance of easy access to help 24 hours a day. For people living with Alzheimer's, a range of technology can be put in place to help make life easier for them and the people that care for them. Sensors can be placed in their homes which unobtrusively monitor for events such as falls, fires or floods and if activated will raise an alert with a carer if present, or at a specialist monitoring centre who can then contact neighbours, family or emergency services as appropriate.

## **Sleep well**

For example, bed occupancy sensors can raise an alert if someone leaves their bed during the night and doesn't return after a short time, so carers can check on their wellbeing. Epilepsy and enuresis sensors can also be used to enable a quick response to incidents, but equally mean that carers don't have to disturb the person they care for during the night to check on them. Being able to get a good night's sleep is beneficial to anyone's health, and in circumstances where an older spouse is caring for their partner, such technology can also enable them to sleep, knowing they'll be woken by the system if needed.

## **Finding freedom**

Telecare can also enable carers to leave the house for short periods, knowing the technology will let them know if there is an issue at home, improving their quality of life and reducing carer stress. It's equally important for people living with conditions like Alzheimer's and vascular disease to be supported to continue maintaining familiar habits and activities outside of the home for as long as possible. Devices such as Tunstall GO, that combine the ability to request help in an emergency away from home with location tracking, mean that familiar routines such as walking to the local library or shop can be continued in safety for longer than may otherwise be the case. This helps to maintain community connections and supports independence and mobility.

## **Rapid response**

For events such as falls and strokes, early assistance is key to mitigating their effects, and technology can enable this, either by the user pressing a button on a bodily-worn device such as a pendant, or by automatically detecting someone has fallen and alerting a carer or monitoring centre. Particularly in the case of people diagnosed with dementia, introducing the technology at an early stage can yield much better results, as they become used to the system being in place.

## **Fit for the future**

Social care and the NHS remain under increasing pressure, but technology is readily available that can help to reduce ambulance call outs and hospital admissions, and delay moves to residential care. It can also help to increase independence and offer comfort to carers. As technology advances, solutions are becoming increasingly predictive and proactive, and more able to effectively harness the wealth of data held by monitoring centres to enable more integrated approaches to care. This insight has the potential to transform the way we support people living with Alzheimer's and vascular diseases by creating targeted, upstream interventions that enable more care to be community-based and person-centred. For the thousands of people every day who receive a diagnosis and their families, having this support can make all the difference.