Setting new digital ambitions

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In the last decade we've seen exponential growth in smart technologies; speakers, heating and lighting systems are now commonplace in many homes across the UK. This has been enhanced by the pandemic, and the requirement for greater mobilisation of new technologies and investment in smart homes has never been greater.

Housing providers, local authorities, the NHS and social care providers, must consider how to meet the needs of an ageing population, and understand the role of technology in connecting older people and those with care needs to support independence, health and wellbeing.

The potential of smart homes and new technologies

TECS and the concept of the 'connected home' improves many areas of modern life and provides effective support to people of all ages. An estimated 1.7 million people in the UK use community alarm and telecare technology to help them remain safe and independent at home.

The latest generation of technology is not just able to respond to potentially life-threatening issues such as fires or gas leaks, but can also offer intelligent enhancements to the lives of vulnerable people. For example, enabling the use of WiFi across a retirement development to support increased contact with friends and family, reducing social isolation, and giving access to online activities and services, therefore supporting inclusion and enhancing wellbeing.

Technology also enables the people to stay connected, and key stakeholders such as clinicians are more easily able to monitor an individual's behaviour and wellbeing. This ensures care is targeted where and when it's needed most, for a more person-centred and proactive approach.

Big data gives insight into behaviour patterns, leading to efficient care planning as part of a strengths and assets-based approach. This predictive modelling can also alert to potential wellbeing issues, enabling more preventative support.

Digital TECS such as community alarms and remote monitoring systems give vulnerable people greater choice in terms of the care they receive. Tailored support can mitigate the effect of incidents such as falls, by recognising an emergency as soon as it occurs.

Technology mobilisation to support ageing at home

Nottingham Community Housing Association (NCHA) is a group of companies providing housing and care throughout the East Midlands, managing approximately 10,000 homes. NCHA's Care and Support framework assists a diverse range of people across the region to build better lives, including those who are frail and elderly.

The Support, Management and Response Service (SMaRT) plays a critical role in underpinning the services provided by the Care and Support (C&S) delivery teams, including an out of hours emergency response service.

Using Tunstall's PNC software, The SMaRT team provides 24/7 support and physical response to C&S accommodation based service users via hardwired community alarm technology and individually tailored packages of care. This ensures a seamless person-centred support service is delivered to all customers.

The software allows a smooth transition to a digital future, enabling monitoring centres to connect with users, comply with GDPR regulations, and prepare for the digital transition with end-to-end IP capability.

Technology mobilisation in a residential care setting

In April, Tunstall's 'triagemanager®' and 'myKiosk™' systems were deployed across 34 of Bolton's care homes to enable the close monitoring of vulnerable residents, whilst reducing the need for clinical staff attendance, thus reducing the risk of cross infection. The systems also support clinicians in the effective prioritisation of care, clearly identifying those most in need of intervention.

For example, residents with dementia may find it more difficult to communicate if they feel unwell, meaning their condition may not be identified until it has advanced.

This innovative, multi-user remote health monitoring solution supports multiple patients in grouped living environments. Where care staff have concerns about the health of a resident, a recording of vital signs can be made and questions can be answered about the resident's health and symptoms using the myKiosk tablet.

By alerting clinicians to symptoms such as rising temperature at an early stage, more effective and preventative care can be delivered. This can help to avoid the need for more complex care, improving outcomes, and supporting cost savings and avoidance.

Looking ahead

The COVID-19 crisis has led to a significant shift in how technology is used by the NHS, social care organisations, and housing providers, accelerating the pace and scale of adoption. There has been increased investment in remote monitoring devices, telecare systems and other similar technologies to enhance independence and improve how we age.

We'll see predictive care technology begin to encompass integration that enables diverse and scalable models of health and social care. Using AI and taking data-driven insight from multiple sources, providers will use this next generation of solutions to optimise Population Health Management programmes by providing personalised and anticipatory care.

Although there's still a long way to go, this is a trend which will continue and we'll see technology and data featuring more prominently in how our services are designed in coming years to increase independent living, reduce the strain on our services, and safeguard them for the future.