

Developing a Telecare Strategy

Developing a Strategy?

It is quite clear that, with our ageing population, reducing workforce and increasingly costly health and social care services, big changes have to be made.

There is a vision that telecare should make a major contribution to this. But the telecare industry is very fragmented and proprietary, and its users more focused on the “care” than the “tele”. It will not address the big issues or deliver the care unless it is planned and used in a strategic approach.

Building a telecare strategy needs a fine balance of what is required of it and what it is capable of. It is not right to buy technology that looks good, if it does not contribute to

- service enhancements of quality or capacity,
- cost savings, or
- meeting customers and their families needs.

Neither is it sensible to devise a strategy that cannot be delivered. You need to have a sound understanding of both sides of the equation, and of how they are changing over your planning horizon.

The big change in technology is that telecare is beginning to use Information and Communications Technology (ICT), to deliver wholly new capabilities in improved communications and preventative care. The technology can support both social and healthcare needs. Care business leaders need to understand the implications of this and the impact it can make on the entire provision of care services, if used wisely.

Service issues



A telecare strategy needs to be part of the overall care strategy, and will have to show clearly how it will make a major change probably in both health and social care. It will need to

- demonstrate the capability to sustain independent living
- consider how to reduce excess bed days and A & E entries,
- show reduction in recuperation time in hospital,
- reduce the numbers going in to care homes and sheltered housing.

The case for implementing a strategy will depend on:

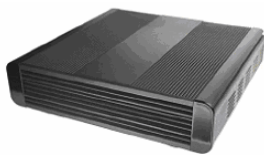
- the projected scale,
- how it changes the use of human and financial resources,
- the plan for the expansion of numbers of people needing care,
- how to incorporate telecare in to the commissionable services, and
- the staff training necessary to achieve it.

Care monitoring centres may need to be reorganised and given the capabilities to manage alerts and respond to incidents on a much larger scale. Relationships and protocols with a range of agencies and third parties that provide services will need to be revised to benefit from shared systems and information, with management protocols, security and confidentiality needing to be addressed.

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The strategy will describe a journey rather than an event. The plans should consider priorities, to identify quick wins, and where benefits can be clearly shown. What group of users will benefit most and what issue will show the most improved use of resources? This will sustain the strategy and give confidence to the plans, if prioritised.

Technology issues



The introduction of ICT to telecare opens up major new opportunities in care provision. The ability to have remote video conversations with users greatly improves the understanding of incidents and the decisions about how to respond. Having eyes and ears is particularly helpful for those with communication difficulties (e.g. stroke sufferers). Continuous monitoring, rather than simple incident alerting, opens up the opportunity for preventative care, as changes to the regular life style can be detected and interventions arranged before crises occur.

Care monitoring staff can have easier, quicker and better access to care providers for response management. The care providers can include friends and families of the users, adding considerably to available resources. Integration of Social Care case management systems and patient health and medication records, will provide more complete information to guide response decision making.

Continuous tracking of a client's conditions and situation can be mapped on to computerised care pathways for such

conditions, and decision support systems assist carers in determining accurate responses and care services highly tailored to each individual's needs. These solutions are currently being developed.

Smart homes are being evaluated for people with care needs. Telecare can contribute here too, enabling a care centre operator to control devices in the client's home, for example

- switching off the gas if he was cooking when he fell over,
- turning off taps when she fell asleep leaving the bath running,
- switching on the microwave to cook food prepared by the visiting carer

The vision



New telecare is exciting, because the opportunities for improving care services and welfare for all, are almost boundless. It requires imagination and drive by care professionals to make it happen along with careful thought, good planning, appropriate skills, experience and expertise to optimise the benefits for users and carers.

iTelecare works with its customers to develop the strategy, tailor the platform to their own telecare operational requirements, integrating with inherited solutions, and adding value through sound ICT, business and professional skills.