

around **Kent**

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Until a few months ago it took 83-year-old Walter Sharp as much as an hour and a half to make the basic health checks he needs to prevent an angina attack. Today it takes him just five minutes.

The difference? A few months ago Walter, from Dartford, had to travel into town so that his doctor could carry out his checks. Today he does it himself – at home.



Using technology to improve lives

A diabetic, Walter is one of a number of people who are helping Kent lead the way in a technological healthcare revolution that is giving users more control over their own health care.

A £1 million investment by Kent County Council is allowing Walter and others to check vital health signs themselves using specially designed equipment and a simple telephone link that keeps them in touch with the medical experts.

The system, called TeleHealth, was pioneered four years ago in America and then brought to Kent. The early results have been so encouraging that the pilot is now being expanded across Ashford, Maidstone, Dartford, Shepway, Gravesend and Swanley - with other areas in the pipeline.

The user-friendly equipment enables home monitoring of blood pressure, blood sugar and oxygen levels, weight and other vital readings. The results are then

sent down the telephone line and can be accessed by medical staff to check for potential problems.

The system reassures users and allows them to stay in the comfort of their own home, but it also means that medical experts can quickly intervene if necessary. Regular monitoring helps spot trends, and is proving more useful than a one-off spot check in a doctor's surgery.

KCC Chief Executive Peter Gilroy believes that the system

can play a vital part in making health and social care services more effective while making life better for the people who use it. “Around 40% of all pressure on services is linked with chronic disease, with its huge costs in terms of rehabilitation, residential or recuperative care, outpatient services and beds.”

Doctors David Lawrence and Alison Milroy were highly sceptical

of TeleHealth before they saw it in action in Seattle last year. They came back convinced of its potential.

Dr Lawrence, a Dartford GP for 19 years, commented: “I went to Seattle very intrigued. I came back fascinated.”

Bearsted-based Dr Milroy added: “People are living longer and there is more and more long-term illness. TeleHealth won’t suit everyone and you have to choose

the right people, but those using it see a huge improvement in their health.”

KCC’s Cabinet Member for Adult Services Kevin Lynes said he was “hugely pleased that Kent is at the forefront of something ground breaking, something that is going to free up scarce resources, but, most importantly, something that it is going to make a huge difference to people’s lives.”

Changing people’s lives



Shamol Ali from Dartford gave up his job three years ago to care for his mother Siddika, who is 58 and suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure and osteoporosis and has suffered from angina and strokes. Before TeleHealth she had been spending 57 days a year in hospital; since TeleHealth she has not been back – and her son is thinking about going back to work part-time. “It is early days yet but it has given me confidence that my mother’s condition is being regularly and carefully monitored.”

In Maidstone, Nellie Hanaford is 93, cracked her hip in a fall at Christmas, suffers from chronic high blood pressure - and yet still lives independently at home. Three times a week, daughter Mary Lockett drops in and helps Nellie log on to TeleHealth so that she can monitor her mother’s blood pressure, weight and other vital health indicators. Last November the system turned into a life saver when it picked up Nellie’s rocketing blood pressure which had reached a dangerously high level and put her at risk of having a stroke.



www.kent.gov.uk/telehealth