NHS works with tech firms to help care home residents and patients connect with loved ones

NHSX is working with technology firms to help some of society's most at-risk and isolated people access vital emotional support and companionship during COVID-19.

As part of this work, Facebook will provide up to 2,050 of its Portal video calling devices for free to hospitals, care homes and other settings including hospices, in-patient learning disability and autism units.

50 of the devices have already been deployed to pilot sites in Surrey, with Manchester, Newcastle and London and other areas to follow, with support from Accenture.

NHSX Digital Transformation Director Iain O'Neil said:

> Technology companies big and small continue to pledge their resources and expertise to support our NHS and social care system in these unprecedented times.
>
> We are working hard to find and develop services that meet people's equally unprecedented needs. Technology has never been so important to providing one of life's most essential things – the ability to communicate with the people we love regardless of where they are.

As well as providing solutions to reducing social isolation among residents and patients, NHSX is working with a range of technology companies to support the NHS and social care system in these unprecedented times.

Additional solutions include enabling health and care staff to work remotely when they may be advised to work at home, improving communication between clinical and care teams, shifting hospital outpatients to virtual appointments, and accelerating the use of online and video consultations within GP and primary care services.

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

> Social distancing is tough on us all, and we must remember how beneficial interaction with loved ones is for our wellbeing.
>
> I'm delighted that NHSX is partnering with Facebook to make it easier for those in care homes to keep in touch with friends and family, alongside the ongoing hard work by NHSX to expand communication capabilities across the health and social care

sector.

Vic Rayner, Executive Director, National Care Forum and Care Provider Alliance, said:

> We are thrilled to see solutions being offered to Adult Social Care providers that can support residents in care homes to communicate with their loved ones remotely during this COVID-19 outbreak, and are very much looking forward to hearing how these Facebook Portal devices are used and what impact they have during this difficult time.
>
> This is a fantastic starting point and with other systems offering similar solutions we are sure that communications between care recipients and their loved ones will continue to be a priority that is supported.

Freddy Abnousi, MD, Head of Health Technology, Facebook said:

> We designed Portal to give people an easy way to connect and be more present with their loved ones. With the global pandemic and social distancing measures, the ability to stay connected is more important than ever.
>
> That’s why we are piloting a programme with NHSX to provide Portal devices in hospitals and other care settings to support patients and help reduce social isolation.

- the Portal devices will be delivered to care homes and other care settings across the pilot sites of Surrey and other regions, including Manchester, Newcastle, Essex and London from this week (commencing 6 April 2020)
- the care homes and care settings involved in the pilot will be able to keep the devices free of charge, and use as they see fit, following the pilot phase
- specific care settings will be selected on the basis of their wifi connectivity and ability to run devices in residents’ rooms or another private location
- NHSX is actively exploring connectivity options for care homes without wifi, including the use of 4G hotspots or data-enabled tablets
- care settings will be given advice by NHSX on device setup, infection control and data protection, including how to complete a factory reset before passing the device to a new user. This will help protect the personal data of different users and staff