

# Just a call away

Telemedicine enables the importation of ECG experts and expertise, through the telephone, into every surgery, or home. Joshua Rowe, Broomwell Healthwatch explains why the NHS can benefit from such practices

**The applications of telemedicine allow** surgeries to take a full 12 lead ECG and transmit the data (via the telephone) to our centre where the specialists interpret and provide a full evaluation, thus avoiding referral to hospital to both A&E and Outpatients.

#### What are the benefits of telemedicine?

Patients love the service because of convenience and because of the immediacy of diagnosis. Doctors like the service because, by having the ECG expertise available, they are able to make better-informed diagnoses. It is hugely beneficial to the NHS because it prevents vast numbers of unnecessary referrals to hospital.

#### Have there been any independent trials to back up what you say?

Now in the fourth year of operation we have handled well over 10,000 calls, and the satisfaction rate is extremely high.

Lancs & South Cumbria Cardiac Network and the North West SHA ran a major 'pilot' last year using our services and the conclusion, published in their official report, demonstrated a potential reduction of some 90,000 referrals to A&E (and 45,000 admissions) with an annual saving to the NHS of some £46 million.

Greater Manchester and Cheshire Cardiac Network supervised the provision of our service across ten PCTs in the region. The first 4 PCTs (48 surgeries) completed 12 months of use in November 2007 and the audited results demonstrate that 57% of patients avoided referrals to the second-

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ary sector through the use of our service. What this means is that a national application of the service across all 10,500 surgeries could save the NHS as many as 300,000-400,000 referrals annually.

#### Are there any other appropriate applications?

There are many applications including: Arrhythmia Monitoring whereby patients wear a watch-like device and when they feel any palpitations, they record their (1 lead) ECG by simply placing the hand over the watch. The unit then transmits the signal to the centre for evaluation.

Weight Monitoring (CHF) - Home Monitoring is a simple and highly effective Home Monitoring application whereby we monitor the weight of Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) patients from the comfort of their home instead of having them monitored in hospital.

Another application is the Home monitoring of Cardiac patients (CHD) from the comfort of home. The 12 lead ECG - Home Monitoring service is of particular benefit to post operative or post MI patients. In the vast majority of cases, patients are reassured and remain at home. Conversely, where indicated, the centre will accelerate referral to hospital and significantly shorten sensation-to-needle time.

Other home Monitoring applications which are available for roll out, subject to demand include; COPD monitoring; SpO2 monitoring; blood pressure monitoring and glucose monitoring.

Apart from the vast savings of around £250 million / annum our telemedical monitoring can bring to the NHS, the service sits well with general government guidelines for example; empowerment and choice for patients; the 18 weeks pathway; care closer to home; practice based commissioning. ●

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#### Other surgery and Home Monitoring services

- Arrhythmia monitoring;
- 12 Lead ECG for Home Monitoring – cardiac monitoring 24/7 from the comfort of home, for post-MI, post-operative or anxious patients;
- Weight - Home Monitoring for CHF patients;
- COPD – Home Monitoring;
- SpO2 – Home Monitoring;
- Blood pressure – Home Monitoring;
- Glucose – Home Monitoring.