

CASE STUDY

Northern Ireland embraces health tech to support care homes in the management of COVID-19



Introduction

Digital Health and Care Northern Ireland (DHCNI) in partnership with HSC Trusts have been developing digital technology to help support care staff in residential care homes across Northern Ireland by providing an overview of the health status of residents during COVID-19.

The Solution

Provided by Inhealthcare, the new service being piloted supports residential care workers to identify residents at risk and who may require timely clinical assessment by a registered nurse or doctor.

The service is simple: care workers complete a daily questionnaire with residents outlining the signs and symptoms associated with COVID-19 and feed the answers into an app which sends the data safely and securely to community-based health care teams, such as district nursing and Enhanced Care at Home.

If any responses fall out of the range set for the resident, clinicians are alerted so they can intervene in the care of the individual and respond with appropriate support.

This digital technology has been tested in a small number of care homes with approximately 45 residents being monitored daily. Lessons learnt have allowed practitioners to look at how this digital intervention could play a part in supporting care homes in the longer term.

Claire Büchner, Assistant Director from DHCNI, said: "This is a proactive and anticipatory approach to supporting care homes and should certainly be considered as part of a care pathway. It will provide assurance to residents and their relatives that care workers are being supported by health professionals."

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Results

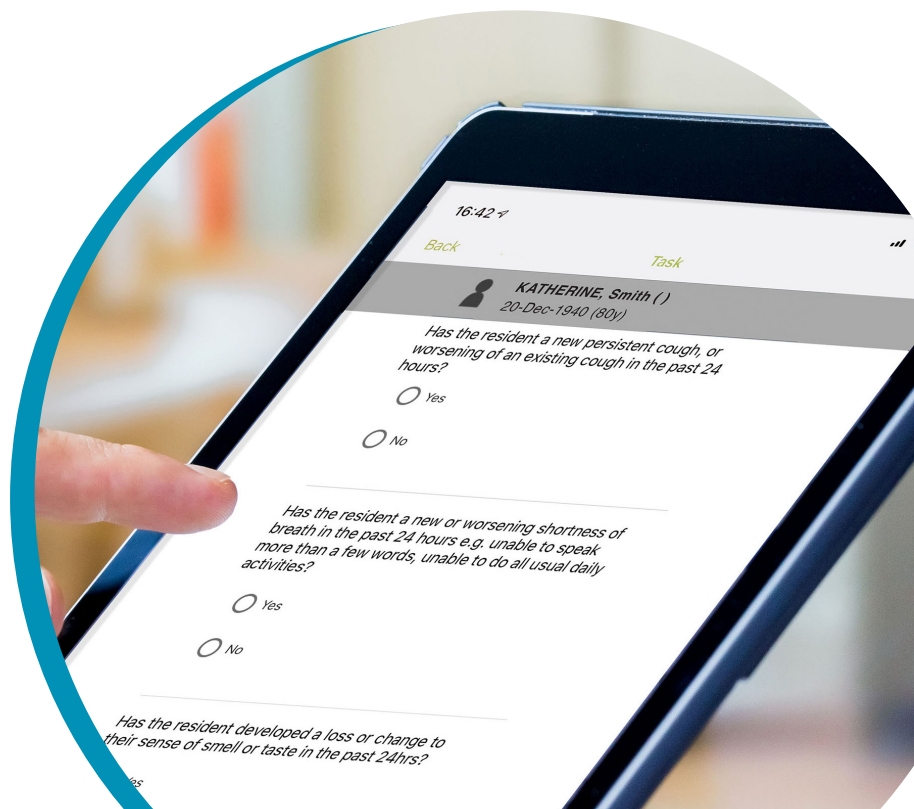
The pilot demonstrated the benefit in providing extra support and training to care home staff in monitoring residents for any signs of deterioration. Ms Büchner added: *“It was evident that care home staff knew their residents very well and were aware of subtle changes in their behaviour indicating the early onset of signs of illness.”*

A care worker said: *“I have learned the importance of observation, noting changes and communicating more closely with my colleagues and I am enjoying the opportunity to have more responsibility. This knowledge and experience has given me more confidence and made me more aware of any changes that arise as observations are done.”*

As the pilot projects began, Chief Nursing Officer, Professor Charlotte McArdle said: *“I am very supportive of this important piece of work and how it is developing. It will be reassuring to residents and relatives that a timely response to healthcare needs will be available.”*

“Combining the ability to record observations through a digital platform with responsive clinical nursing assessment will add a new dimension to the provision of nursing care and treatment available to residents who develop healthcare needs in residential care homes.”

Residential care homes typically look after people who can no longer manage in their own home.



Bryn Sage, chief executive of Inhealthcare, said: *“We are delighted to be working with Digital Health and Care Northern Ireland and HSC Trusts to support the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people. We have been very impressed with the highly compassionate, forward-looking and competent response to the pandemic in Northern Ireland.”*

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