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TeleHealth Technology: Changing the Lives of Newham Residents with Long Term Conditions

Newham Council and PCT's Whole System Demonstrator (WSD) TeleHealth and TeleCare Trial, is well underway in Newham and participants are already experiencing the life-changing benefits these new health technologies have to offer.

Local TeleHealth user Carol Hodges, 58, suffers from Diabetes as well as a heart condition which means she has an irregular heartbeat and palpitations. Carol's blood pressure often drops very low and, the concern for her and her husband is that it could happen quite rapidly with little time to recognise the symptoms.

Using TeleHealth since January 2009, Carol is able to take her own blood pressure, weight, pulse, blood sugar and oxygen levels each day. The readings are taken with special equipment which is linked to a set-top box connected to her television. The results, which Carol can view on her television, are automatically uploaded to a team of healthcare professionals who view them daily.

"Ever since having TeleHealth, I know what's happening within my body. Without it I wouldn't know that my blood pressure keeps dropping...I don't know what I would do without it," she said.

Though TeleHealth is not to be confused with an emergency response service, close monitoring has meant that any dramatic changes in the readings of people with conditions like Carol's, are often picked up in rapid time.

In one instance, Carol was not feeling well and thought she would take her blood pressure to check if it had dropped. It had dropped to 80, which is very low, and she was experiencing extreme shortage of breathe.

"I called the nursing team and told them that I was not feeling at all well. They took a look at my readings and said that my blood pressure looked very low. Before I knew it an ambulance was here at my house... If it wasn't for them I don't think I'd be here today... a few more minutes could have been vital," she said.

When Carol arrived at the hospital, tests undertaken revealed the cause was high levels of potassium in her blood. She was kept in hospital overnight, where she was treated, and discharged the next day.

Carol is now playing a much more active role in the management of her own health and is more conscious of any changes in her readings.

"It has helped me with my weight too. Weighing myself every day really encourages me to keep an eye on my health because I can see my progress. I've lost over two stone because it keeps me on my toes to watch what I eat."

To find out more about the WSD Trial visit www.NewhamWSDTrial.org

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For further information, case studies or to arrange an interview please contact:

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Backgrounder

About Whole System Demonstrator Programme

Newham Council together with the Primary Care Trust are undertaking a two-year Department of Health funded research project – the WSD TeleHealth and TeleCare trial - to find out how technology in the home can help people manage their own health while maintaining their independence.

Newham Council and Primary Care Trust were successful in their bid to become one of three sites to take part. Around 2,000 local people are participating in the Trial and have the opportunity of using either the TeleCare or TeleHealth systems in their home. TeleHealth is aimed at people with long term health conditions such as diabetes, heart failure and/or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Those who fulfil the trial criteria for TeleHealth should have received a letter from their GP asking them to participate.

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