



**Near Me scale-up programme (Covid-19 response) –
care homes workstream**

30 June 2020

Summary

To support the scale-up of the Near Me video consulting service, the Care Inspectorate completed an engagement exercise with all older people's care homes in Scotland. We provided information on Near Me, guidance on technical setup, over the phone training to staff and links to training materials and guidance to support the consultation process.

A similar exercise is currently underway across adult and children's residential homes.

- Engagement was positively received and 95% of home participated.
- Access to an internet connection from each resident's room (usually via Wi-Fi) varied. 56% of homes had full coverage, 39% partial coverage and only 5% had no coverage.
- Access to suitable equipment varied.
- We commended the ingenuity of care home staff in repurposing devices, using personal smartphones and mobile data allowances. This has helped to make sure that around 70% of care homes have had the capability to participate in Near Me consultations.
- Further work is needed to make sure the sustained and continued use of Near Me as care homes move to business as usual. This includes:
 - resolving equipment and internet connectivity gaps;
 - ongoing engagement with care homes to ensure the necessary skills are in place; and
 - continuing to develop Near Me within GP and community services to make sure consultations are offered to those who live in care homes.

Introduction

Near Me (powered by Attend Anywhere) is a video consulting service that enables people to have health and social care appointments from home or wherever is convenient.

Since March 2020, Near Me video consulting has been used to reduce exposure to coronavirus by enabling both patients and clinicians to consult while maintaining physical distancing. Within primary care, all GP practices are now able to provide Near Me consultations. A wide range of community and secondary care services can also now provide it. This has led to a rapid increase in the use of Near Me, with over 15 000 video consultations now taking place each week.

The Care Inspectorate led the care homes for older people workstream. We engaged with over 800 care homes for older people in Scotland to use Near Me, enabling consultations to continue while reducing exposure to Covid-19 for both patients and clinicians.

TEC care homes workstream

As part of the Technology Enabled Care (TEC) Programme, and in collaboration with the Care Inspectorate, a project to support the rollout of video consulting was set up in Lanarkshire, Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and Highland. Care homes were willing to take part in video consultations, however uptake among clinical teams remained low. While some services, such as tissue viability, care home staff training programmes and (a limited volume of) GP consultations were successfully established, there was insufficient uptake among clinicians to develop sufficient call volumes to move to a business as usual delivery model.

Near Me scale-up in response to COVID-19

In response to COVID-19, a range of workstreams have been established by the national Near Me team within the Scottish Government. In addition to the scale-up within general practice, they have provided support and guidance to establish key services including mental health, maternity and cancer services, along with support to care homes.

As one of the workstreams to receive additional support during the Covid-19 pandemic, stakeholder specific guidance was produced in mid-March to introduce and support Near Me in residential care providers for older people, other residential services, and hospices. This guidance provided information on the technical setup, processes and links to training materials and guidance to support the consultation process. You can find this guidance at: <https://tec.scot/digital-health-and-care-in-scotland/video-enabled-health-and-care/covid-19-implementing-near-me/>

Care Inspectorate engagement

Engagement

We supported care homes for older people to use Near Me. The Improvement Support Team along with service support colleagues contacted over 800 care homes between 17 April and 8 June 2020.

As care homes link significantly with their local GP practice, we followed the activity phases that Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) undertook with GP practices. HIS was the lead organisation for this workstream. By following the same phased approach to geographic regions, this enabled GP practices to consider the potential clinical use of Near Me prior to care homes contacting them.

We contacted care homes by phone and provided additional information by email and offered care homes a Near Me test call.

Many care homes were experiencing significant pressures from a range of sources and some were cautious about the legitimacy of the caller. So, we provided follow up

emails to verify that we were calling from the Care Inspectorate. This gave us the opportunity to send reference material and offer a time for a follow up call.

Care home response

Care home staff engaged positively. Some were unable to talk when we first called for operational reasons, so we agreed a suitable time to call back. Additional resources were sent to 75% of the care homes. Thirty-seven percent of care homes took part in Near Me demonstrations and test calls and found these beneficial. These also highlighted the range of technical confidence within the sector. One manager felt uncomfortable that it was a video consultation and passed the device over to a colleague. We talked another person through how to access Chrome and supported them to add the link to the tool bar, complete the entry screens and ran a Near Me test call. This person declared it 'was easy' and asked what they needed to do to use it for the people they support.

We signposted care homes to the nearme.scot website so that they could access tools and materials to engage locally with staff, those experiencing care and their families. We reminded people to use Near Me each week in our care service provider updates. A stakeholder group of representatives from CoSLA, Scottish Care and the Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland (CCPS) also promoted Near Me to the sector through their communication channels.

It was encouraging that many care homes immediately contacted their GP practice and other clinical professionals to discuss how they could use Near Me during Covid-19, and in future.

Awareness raising

We offered care homes Near Me demonstrations and further information. Setting this all up and arranging call back times took considerable time. Demonstrations to care homes were predominantly to care homes managers although some asked for further demonstrations at team meetings. At least one divisional manager of a care group followed up the contact to ensure consistency across their care portfolio in providing access to Near Me.

Some care homes took immediate positive action, contacting their GP or district nurse to find out if they could use Near Me. One care home cancelled their planned test call with us as they had arranged one with the GP practice instead.

Feedback

Some care homes had already tried Near Me and did not need additional support from us. We received comments such as 'one click and you are in' and 'it's great'. A small number of care homes (less than 1%) had expressed a desire to use video consultation only to be advised that the local clinic 'was not offering it'.

"Don't be scared of it, one click and you are in. The person can see and talk to the health professional directly. We have used it for a clear picture of a wound".

Care home manager, Highland

Twenty percent of care homes told us they had used Near Me before and gave us examples with local GP practices, tissue viability specialist nurses, speech and language therapists, podiatrists, liaison nurses and for contact with relatives. Care homes recognised that video consultation would not be appropriate for everyone experiencing care, acknowledging that for some, it could be confusing. However, a number identified that video consultation could contribute to person-centred care.

“It really helps to reduce staff anxiety. As no GPs are able to visit the home, the staff are relieved that the health professional can actually see the patient during the consultation. This is a big improvement on the phone and photographs by email approach”.

Care home manager, Glasgow

You will find more comments from care homes in appendix 1.

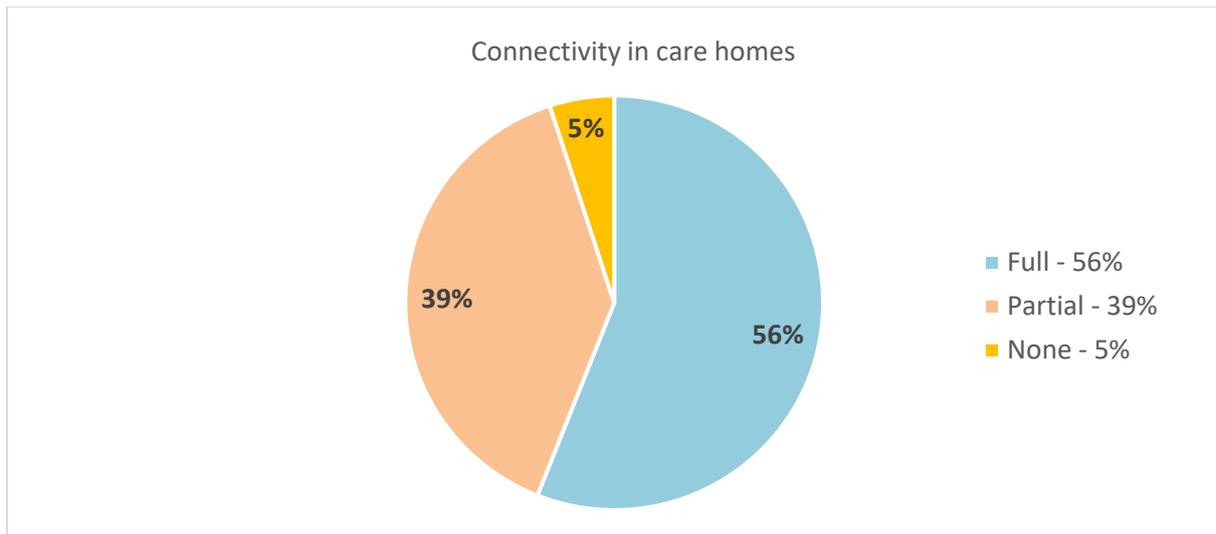
Six percent of care homes stated that they had heard of Near Me but had not had the opportunity to use it. Five percent of care homes had previously used, or had started to use, video consultation to support social engagement during lockdown. As a result, these staff teams felt confident to try Near Me. Five percent of care homes did not participate in the engagement. Three care homes have since been in touch to seek support and test calls.

Technical readiness

Access to equipment within the care homes for older people varied significantly. Consequently, we asked additional questions to determine digital access within services. Some stated that the premises had Wi-Fi throughout and had mobile devices accessible to staff and residents. Others indicated limitations with connectivity or no connectivity. Some also identified that the hardware was old and did not meet the specification required to use Near Me. In some isolated incidences staff were using personal devices.

Sixty-five percent of the care homes provided their connectivity status of which: 56% stated they had full connectivity, 39% partial connectivity and 5% stated they had no connectivity.

Figure 1 Care home connectivity



Five percent of care services indicated that they used a mobile device. Where a care home stated that it did not have access to a mobile device, we signposted them to the Scottish Care ‘Tech Device Network’ (<https://scottishcare.org/techdevicenetwork/>). This is a scheme set up to repurpose donated equipment to enable care providers to support people experiencing care to keep in touch with families and friends.

Additionally, Scottish Care provided further technical support to 4% of care providers for reasons such as enabling access to chrome or to set-up a device if this was identified during the initial call.

Some care homes reported that they had ordered tablets, however increased delivery times hindered deployment. Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership have provided devices to the residential services managed by the local authority, while NHS Dumfries and Galloway have committed to ensuring all care homes for older people in their region have access to a mobile device to enable remote access to services by the end of July 2020.

Staff confidence in using technology varied. In situations where the care home manager acknowledged they had limited skill, they delegated the call to colleagues who were ‘tech savvy’.

Many care homes have experience of using social media platforms and acknowledged that using Near Me was similar and could be easily used. We signposted care homes to the nearme.scot website to access supporting material for staff training and development.

In some care homes, IT security policies had been established. These included restrictions such as disabling webcams, preventing the use of Chrome or blocking access to Near Me. These issues were raised by managers, often at a group or regional level.

You will find the range of technical issues raised during the calls in appendix 2.

Adult and children's residential homes

Although outwith the scope of the original commission, we are conducting a similar engagement exercise with over 300 residential care providers for children and young people and residential care for adults. This will be completed by end of July.

Care Inspectorate use of Near Me

During the pandemic, we began to use Near Me to engage with care providers because, due to shielding arrangements, we had limited access to care home premises. This provided an opportunity to engage visually with managers, staff and those experiencing care. Using Near Me provides additional opportunities to embed video consultations as a communications tool in future.

Recommendations

Care homes for older people embraced the opportunity to help the people they support to participate in clinical appointments using Near Me. Repurposing equipment, using personal devices, or moving to an area of the home with internet access ensured that the vast majority of homes were able to participate in a Near Me consultation. However, for this to become embedded in the sector a number of issues will need to be resolved.

- Access to a reliable internet connection / WiFi varied significantly. Rurality, building structure and IT infrastructure affect the ability to provide video consultations in all areas of the care home. As more services are offered online, the bandwidth available may constrain what services can be delivered. A cost-effective solution is needed to provide internet access from all resident's rooms to access the full range of digital services.
- Access to mobile devices varied significantly. Some care providers did not have mobile devices, others only had one. In some homes, the devices were assigned to specific locations in the premises or to members of staff. As the range of clinical, wellbeing and recording services offered online increases, easy access to equipment is needed to ensure that person-centred care is not hampered by device availability.
- The need to use Near Me to support individuals will vary in each care setting. Regular reinforcing of the opportunity and benefits will be needed until it is embedded in both the caring and clinical sectors.
- Confidence in using video consultation varied, although this has increased over the weeks of the pandemic. Access to training material and opportunities for staff to practice and gain confidence would be beneficial. Ongoing availability to this would be needed to reflect changes to the staffing teams within care providers.
- Clinical engagement with Near Me will need to continue to ensure that Near Me appointments are offered by the clinical teams.

Appendix 1 Comments from care homes

Care home manager in Highland

“Don't be scared of it, one click and you are in. The person can see and talk to the health professional directly. We have used it for a clear picture of a wound”.

Care home manager in Ayr and Arran

“We find it terrific”.

A care home manager in Grampian

“We are very positive about its use”.

Care home manager in Glasgow

“Very useful – we used it with a podiatrist, and it was great that she was able to actually see the gentleman's toes”.

Care home manager in the north of Scotland

“A care home was able to quickly set up an appointment with a local GP to find out if a resident's rash was shingles, as she had a pregnant member of staff who was under 12 weeks. The GP was able to quickly reassure that it was not shingles, and the manager said that before this would've taken ages”.

Care home manager in Glasgow

“It really helps to reduce staff anxiety. As no GPs are able to visit the home, the staff are relieved that the health professional can actually see the patient during the consultation. This is a big improvement on the phone and photographs by email approach”.

Care home manager in Dumfries and Galloway

“We had been asked by speech and language therapy if they were using Near Me. After our test call we had a resident who required a non-emergency swallowing assessment but, due to shielding arrangements, the speech and language therapy team was obviously unable to come on site. We let them know that they were now able to use Near Me and a swallowing assessment was set up”.

Care home manager in Fife

“We’ve been on a call to the GP and tried a test call which worked fine. No need to do another test and really happy we are set up now”.

Appendix 2 the range of technical issues raised during the calls

Connectivity

No internet available.

Internet very variable in older buildings.

Poor Wi-Fi.

No 4G where service is.

Broadband speed too slow.

Connectivity too poor.

Lack of Wi-Fi throughout the house.

Good connection in some areas but not others.

Communal area is connected.

Connectivity limited to office.

Wi-Fi in some residents’ rooms but not all.

Very limited connection only at front door of home.

Size of the building causes the signal issues.

Equipment

Some equipment requiring updating.

Only one PC.

Only two PCs which can access internet.

Using desktop PC as laptop not available.

Equipment not suitable.

Office tech not suitable.

Office PC has no mic or camera.

Microphone not working.

No sound.

Using a dongle.

No device with camera.

Awaiting better equipment.

Service does not have own tablets, however many residents do and will be able to use Near me.

Mobile devices

Service does not have any tablets.

No handheld devices.

Few tablets.

One iPad with a charger that doesn't work.

iPad not up-to-date.

Both tablets in the home need upgraded.

Have iPads but have restrictions on them.

Have an iPad which is in regular use.

Limited access to handheld devices.

Using phones as don't have any handheld devices.

Operating issues

Will need to get Chrome downloaded.

No devices that they can get email to.

Some software requiring updated.

Do not have Google Chrome or Safari.

Flexible practice during the pandemic

Using staff phones as no tablets.

Staff using own iPads.

Staff need to use personal mobiles/data.

Staff are happy to use own phone and 4G.

Some staff having to use phone hotspots.