

Supporting the Psychosocial Needs of Palliative Care and Cancer Patients through the Use of Telehealth



RESEARCHERS

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THE OVERVIEW

Aberystwyth University's Centre for Excellence in Rural Health Research (CERHR) informed the development of a new telehealth service from 2014 which delivers support to palliative care patients in Mid-West Wales. This is significant for the region as it supports the Health Board's response to the recommendations set out in the Mid Wales Healthcare Study (Longley et al., 2014). Impact is evidenced by changes to the Health Board's palliative care strategy ensuring the ongoing delivery of telehealth services; personal testimonials from patients demonstrating improvement in wellbeing and daily functioning; and evidence of improving efficiency and access to services for staff and patients.



THE RESEARCH

Aberystwyth University's CERHR, led by Dr Rachel Rahman, has examined the use of telemedicine to improve rural access to health services. Collaborating with Hywel Dda University Health Board's Palliative Care Team, a telehealth psychosocial support service for rural palliative care patients was established. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, telehealth was not part of routine service provision, and this was one of the first UK services to provide home based support for palliative care patients in this way.

“Patients have fed back to us that they have felt empowered by not having to make the journey but be able to have that support and service from the comfort of their own home.”

GUDRUN JONES, ART THERAPIST, HYWEL DDA UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD

THE IMPACT

SHAPING POLICY, STRATEGY AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TELEHEALTH FOR PALLIATIVE CARE

AU research influenced, and led to the inclusion of telehealth into the Health Board's palliative care service. A proposal, presented by the Health Board's Telemedicine Manager, was supported by Hywel Dda's palliative care strategy group, who agreed to include telehealth as part of the Health Board's strategy for service delivery.

IMPROVING PATIENTS' ACCESS TO PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND SUPPORTING ACCESS TO CARE CLOSER TO HOME

The telehealth service provided vital psychosocial support for palliative care and cancer patients. The service subsequently enabled convenient access to multidisciplinary staff, including consultant led services, nursing, and occupational therapy. Patients reported how the service improved their ability to manage their daily lives, adapt to a terminal diagnosis, and minimised the need to miss appointments.

BENEFITTING THE WORKING PRACTICES OF HEALTHCARE STAFF

Health board staff who used the telehealth service saved travel-time which increased the efficiency of their clinical work. The service also improved staff access to patients, who were otherwise hard to reach either because of geography or psychological barriers.

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