NHS Highland case study

Vision helps pharmacists spend less time driving to remote and rural medication reviews.

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Case study.

Medication reviews are beneficial for polypharmacy patients. NHS Highland covers a vast, remote and rural area. Face-to-face reviews were only possible with extensive travel. Could telehealth enable a new model of pharmaceutical care that removes the need to drive to remote and rural locations?

Think of Scotland and imagine the sweeping landscapes of mountains, lochs and castles. Now spare a thought for the healthcare professionals that contend with its:

- difficult terrain
- remote areas
- treacherous weather
- rural roads
- limited communications infrastructure

NHS Highland provides healthcare services for 320,000 people. Twenty per cent are city dwellers in and around Inverness. The rest live in pockets of a remote and rural area that covers 12,500 square miles. This vast area combined with its thin population density creates specific challenges. It’s difficult and expensive to provide consistent access to healthcare services in these circumstances.

Medication reviews for polypharmacy

Polypharmacy is the concurrent use of five or more medicines by a single patient. Because we’re living longer, and more people have comorbidity, polypharmacy is increasing. Medication reviews are necessary for these patients because circumstances change. Each review takes between ten and twenty minutes, and creates opportunities to:

1. Improve the patient’s understanding of their medicines
2. Make sure medicines are safe and effective
3. Ensure medicines are still appropriate (as patients’ conditions and guidelines can change over time)
4. Ensure all monitoring for the medicines, such as blood tests, has been completed and is within expected ranges
5. Identify side effects and address these

NHS Highland offers polypharmacy medication reviews for patients registered at dispensing practices. Pharmacists were driving up to four hours each day to visit these practices and see patients. Driving is a waste of time and limits how many reviews are possible. The geographical challenges also made it difficult to review every eligible patient.

Clare Morrison is a pharmacist and Senior Clinical Quality Lead at NHS Highland. In January 2017, Clare started a pilot to test the use of telehealth for medication reviews. The pilot service called ‘Pharmacy Anywhere’ aimed to reduce travel and improve access to reviews for patients registered at three rural dispensing practices. The pilot was funded by the Health Foundation. There were two aspects to this long-distance care pilot:

- Using video consultations so the pharmacist could talk face-to-face with the patient
- Remote access to the electronic patient records using Vision Anywhere

Clare explains the benefits of telehealth: “It delivers resilience to services in rural areas where recruiting health professionals is a challenge. On the other hand, it enables pharmacists to work remotely, which means they can live and work full-time in rural locations where historically there might only have been small part-time jobs.”

What is Vision Anywhere?

Vision Anywhere is an innovative app that provides 24/7 access to patient records. It’s available for iPhone, iPad, Android devices and Windows laptops. Typical uses include:

- GP home visits and nursing home rounds
- Federated GP services, such as extended hours appointments
- Remote access to medical records away from the GP practice

It offers online and offline access to medical records. As well as viewing information, you can add data and update the patient’s record too.

The NHS Highland pharmacy team uses Vision Anywhere during medication reviews. Now, they can conduct the reviews from any location, such as local NHS premises, a different GP practice, a care home or even the pharmacist’s home. They no longer need to travel to each GP practice to see their patients.

During medication reviews, pharmacists can use Vision Anywhere to view a patient’s medical history, including their medication. Interventions include:

- Reauthorising repeats
- Adding new medicines or stopping a repeat item
- Providing advice

Details of any changes they make are added to the electronic medical record at the patient’s GP practice.

Email info@visionhealth.co.uk for more information or to find out how Vision Anywhere can revolutionise care for you and your patients.

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Saving money with remote appointments

The pilot ran through to April 2018. The pharmacy team offered remote appointments to 388 patients. 85 per cent accepted. Most patients chose a telephone consultation rather than video, often due to poor internet connectivity.

Seventy per cent of reviews resulted in an intervention to ensure the safe and effective use of medication. Providing the service by telehealth instead of in-person saved £8,448 a year for the three GP practices.

There has been a significant reduction in travel time. Pharmacists are now able to spend more of their time in a clinical role. Patients don’t need to travel either because they can stay at home for their medication review. Geography no longer dictates the level of service. Pharmacists can provide the same service to every eligible patient, including in areas where there might have been a gap before. NHS Highland is improving access and bringing services closer to patients.

Clare explains how the pilot has been positive for pharmacists and their patients. “Telehealth has enabled the pharmacists to do their job remotely and has saved huge amounts of travel time. But what has struck us most are the patient stories: how much easier it is to attend appointments from home, not having to arrange transport, not having to go out in icy weather, and even being able to focus on the whole appointment rather than spending the first few minutes catching their breath from the walk in.”

The success of the project was dependent on cultural factors rather than technical:

- a readiness to focus on telehealth
- a positive approach to change and improvement
- engagement with GP practices, the eHealth department and technology suppliers

The remote review scheme is now integrated into NHS Highland’s pharmacy service and has led to the creation of NHS Near Me, which aims to deliver telehealth at scale.

Email info@visionhealth.co.uk for more information or to find out how Vision Anywhere can revolutionise care for you and your patients.