

Charge Free Introductory Period for Telecare

Briefing Note
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Background

Charging for telecare provides a revenue stream that subsidises both the ongoing cost of telecare services, plus the up-front investment costs associated with its use (equipment purchase, staffing, call monitoring costs). However, charging is frequently highlighted as a barrier to people accepting and therefore benefitting from telecare. In addition, the variation in charges across Scotland presents issues for those working across HSCP boundaries, for example hospital staff, when making referrals for the service. This can result in people at the point of referral not being fully informed about the costs associated with accepting the service, leading to them declining the service later.

To increase telecare uptake several telecare services now provide a charge-free introductory period of telecare.

Descriptor

Provision of an initial free, no obligation trial period for telecare (six to twelve weeks), including for those being discharged from hospital.

Features

- Barrier free access to telecare.
- Consideration of telecare is embedded in hospital discharge planning.
- Safe supported discharge care, peace of mind for the person and their family/support circle.

Potential benefits

- Increased telecare uptake. Services offering a free trial find that almost all people continue the service beyond the trial period, having recognised the benefits and reassurance the alarm provides.
- Improved hospital discharge care planning with increased requests for 'just enough' homecare services rather than 'just in case' additional homecare visits.
- Supports early safe discharge from hospital.
- Enables a standardised approach for referrers/assessors, removing requirement to discuss finances.

Potential impact

- Increased uptake of telecare.
- Reduced pressure on resources by decreasing over-prescription of homecare visits including additional check visits.

Considerations

- Loss of income for HSCPs versus longer term value for money from increasing the uptake of telecare.
- A significant increase in uptake of telecare would require a proportionate increase in installation and call handling staff and 24-hour responder services, and/or an increase in responses by families/friends or other services.
- The duration of the free period e.g., 6 weeks or 12 weeks (to take people through the winter).
- Whether or not there should be an eligibility criteria. For example, available to all new customers or only as part of a discharge/reablement care package.

Costs

If telecare services were offered free of charge for an introductory period, lost income for HSCPs would range from around £8k to £21k per annum (based on an average of 50 additional customers each month), depending on the level of charge applied. However, there is a cost associated with collecting the charge and debt recovery, which reduces the income received from charging.

Examples from practice

- East Renfrewshire HSCP have embedded a free 6 week introductory period for all new telecare customers.