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Video link to elderly cuts hospital visits

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A round-the-clock service that connects care home residents to nurses over a video link has slashed unnecessary ambulance journeys, hospital admissions and GP appointments.

Airedale NHS foundation trust in West and North Yorkshire said that a “telemedicine” service launched in February had reduced ambulance call-outs to care homes by almost 30 per cent and GP referrals by 40 per cent.

A third of calls to the digital hub at Airedale General Hospital are dealt with remotely, with no need for further action. Participating care homes have been given laptops with high-quality cameras, as well as staff training on how to use the service. Carers can log on with two clicks and, together with resi-

dents, speak to nurses at the hub who have access to their medical notes. The nurses assess whether residents should go to hospital, see a GP or receive a home visit. They can call on other specialists for further advice.

In emergency cases, nurses can advise staff remotely on how to treat patients before an ambulance arrives.

Rachel Ford, a senior nurse, said that in one case she could see from the video link that an 86-year-old resident had had a stroke. She advised carers while they waited for an ambulance. It was likely that the swift treatment was responsible for the resident’s near-complete recovery.

The video-link service is used by 217 homes with about 7,500 residents in parts of Yorkshire and East Lancashire, ranging from isolated rural communities to inner-city Bradford. It has re-

ceived funding from NHS England, which will bring similar services to other areas if the scheme is approved.

A recent report by the Care Quality Commission said that the scheme was “outstanding”. Helen Bourner, director of strategy at the Airedale NHS foundation trust, said: “More than 70 per cent of the residents in these care homes have dementia. For them, the experience of going to a hospital or GP’s surgery can be stressful. Having this kind of access to nurses is reassuring for care staff, residents and their families, besides helping us cut unnecessary admissions and save money.”

The most common reasons for calls to the hub are falls, skin complaints and chest infections. As well as cutting hospital visits the video link allows nurses to spot emergency cases that were initially thought to be trivial.