

PRESS RELEASE

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PIONEERING USE OF VIRTUAL REALITY TO HELP PATIENTS WITH BREATHING DIFFICULTIES

A pioneering programme that helps improve the well-being of people who have chronic or ongoing breathing problems is being trialled in a south Cumbrian GP Practice.

The use of virtual reality to help with the exercise programme for patients has been introduced as part of the Better Care Together strategy, and has already been well-received amongst the patients who have used it.

As well as being able to take part in breathing exercises from the comfort of their own homes - helping to avoid visits to hospital or community facilities, the trailblazing use of new technology also allows health professionals to securely monitor the exercise programme people are using, ensuring that they can be tailored as required.

Dr Muhammad Farhan Amin of the Burnett Edgar Medical Centre on Walney Island in Barrow-in-Furness has introduced the technology as a way of solving two problems.

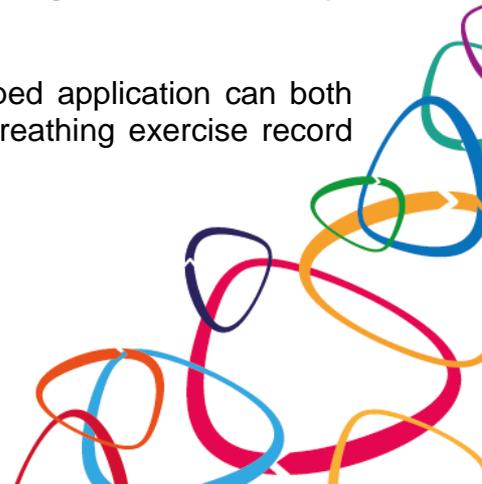
“Firstly many people who need to be on this programme are not able to access it, there is a national shortage of the physiotherapy staff needed to put the sessions on.

“And secondly – if people do some breathing exercises in their own homes – it is impossible for health professionals to monitor them.

“Barrow-in-Furness has many people with chronic lung conditions and the best treatment is to take part in a pulmonary rehabilitation programme.

“Usually this involves going to the hospital outpatient department, but using the latest technology we just need a mobile phone and a virtual reality headset; and the person is transported to a ‘beach’ where they can interact in an exercise class, get educational help, receive breathing strategies and nutritional advice.”

Because the phone is linked to the internet – the specially-developed application can both tailor the breathing exercises for each person and also send the breathing exercise record back to the health professional that is supporting the patient.



“It’s exciting – the next stages are to train other health professionals in the area – and continue to develop this technology.

“We want to make the exercise classes really interactive so that people taking part in them can communicate with other patients who are also taking part in the breathing exercises in their own homes – it could become a virtual reality breathing exercise club!”

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Notes to editors:

1. Better Care Together is a partnership of eleven organisations, including Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, the North West Ambulance Service, Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, NHS Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS Lancashire North Clinical Commissioning Group and the two Local Authorities: Cumbria County Council and Lancashire County Council and two GP Provider Federations: North Lancashire Medical Group and South Cumbria Primary Care Collaborative working together in partnership.
2. Clinical leaders from across all organisations have designed a new clinical model of care for Morecambe Bay, through a series of design workshops and clinical. The new care models have been strongly influenced by the wide ranging engagement with stakeholders which has taken place over the past two years.

