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News release

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Telehealth could help the NHS treat patients in new ways and manage rising demands and costs

The NHS in Scotland should do more to consider telehealth when introducing or redesigning services. It provides an opportunity to treat patients in new ways, and to help manage rising costs and demand.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *A review of telehealth in Scotland*, looks at how the health service is providing care to patients at a distance, using a range of technologies such as mobile phones, the internet, digital televisions, video-conferencing and self-monitoring equipment. This could include a consultation between a patient and a doctor being carried out at different locations using video-conferencing.

The report says NHS boards must look at new ways of delivering care, particularly as the NHS is facing growing demand. Telehealth has the potential to help deliver a range of clinical services more efficiently and effectively, and boards should be considering it when introducing or redesigning services.

Telehealth is popular with patients, doctors and nurses who have used it. Its benefits include less travel, faster diagnoses and fewer hospital admissions. However there have been limited opportunities for clinical staff to gain experience of using it, and more education and training is needed.

Auditor General for Scotland, Robert Black, said: "The NHS in Scotland is facing serious pressures, from the ageing population and increasing numbers of people with long-term health conditions such as diabetes and respiratory illnesses. Telehealth could help to provide a range of services efficiently and effectively. Where it has been used, patients, doctors and nurses generally like it."

Audit Scotland looked at the use of telehealth to monitor patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) at home. The report concluded that telehealth management of COPD patients at home might help NHS boards avoid costs of around £1,000 per patient per year, mostly through reducing admissions to hospital.

There are about 70 small initiatives across Scotland which have identified the benefits of telehealth. Three large-scale UK projects, involving at least 37,000 people should improve the evidence. The first of these is due to report later in the year.

The Scottish Centre for Telehealth has recently been merged into NHS 24 and the Scottish Government has put in place a new e-Health strategy. These changes should help the development of telehealth services across the country.

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Notes to editors

1. The Scottish Centre for Telehealth (SCT) was set up in 2006 and originally hosted by NHS Grampian. A Scottish Government review in late 2008 found it had made some progress but lacked clear strategic direction and there was confusion over its role and purpose. The review recommended SCT join NHS 24 to position itself as a national resource. This happened in April 2010 and has provided more direction and focus to SCT's activity, and it has since published its first strategic framework. A PDF of this can be found [here](#).
2. Only about 40 per cent of the telehealth initiatives in Scotland have been evaluated. What evidence there is suggests telehealth offers benefits to patients and NHS boards, but overall there is still a lack of reliable

evidence about its efficiency and cost-effectiveness. However evidence will soon be strengthened by three large-scale projects currently under way or being developed. These are:

- the Telescot project in NHS Lothian, involving more than 1,000 patients. The project involves a series of trials, aimed at supporting people with COPD, diabetes, congestive heart failure and hypertension, by using a range of different technologies in their own homes to monitor their condition.
 - the Whole Systems Demonstrator programme, covering more than 6,000 people in three areas of England. This programme aims to assess the benefits of telehealth by evaluating how technology can help people manage their own health while living independently.
 - the UK-wide Delivering Assisted Living Lifestyles at Scale project, covering at least 10,000 patients in the UK including five sites in Scotland. The project aims to demonstrate how technology can be used to help improve the quality of life of older people and people living with long-term conditions.
3. Telehealth might not always be an appropriate way of delivering clinical care and it may not be suitable for all patients and all specialties. We have developed a list of questions to help NHS boards assess potential opportunities for using telehealth. This can be found in Appendix 4 of the main report.
 4. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
 5. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
 6. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.