

Internet service improves care for newborns and chronically ill

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(Medical Xpress) -- Premature infants often do better at home than in hospitals. The relationships with parents and siblings are more natural, and they run a lower risk of contracting contagious diseases than at the hospital. With the new Internet service developed and tested by Chalmers, patients can be at home and at the same time get better follow-up and maintain a dialog with caring staff.

Anna Gund, who publicly defended her doctoral dissertation recently, has worked with the new Internet service Care@Distance. It includes, for example, a Website where the chronically ill, or parents to [newborns](#) that require more careful follow-up, regularly fill in measurement values and other data related to their state of health. Care workers thereby receive ongoing information about patients without having to be on site.

“Similar systems are tested now and again, with positive outcomes, but it seems to be hard to make them part of routine care,” says Anna Gund. “We have developed a system based on the technology that is already used in most homes, and we believe that this can facilitate further dissemination.”

The Chalmers researchers designed and tested a simple, inexpensive, and adaptable system where patients and care workers only need a computer or a smart phone with Internet capability. Most other systems are based on parts that are more expensive and more complicated to learn to use. Care@Distance was tested in two groups: on the one hand, seniors with heart failure and, on the other hand, [premature infants](#). In both cases the

solution functions well, but the findings show that a key factor is that the caring staff must truly embrace the technology and provide regular feedback on the information submitted by the patient.

“In cases where they have done so, patients were very positive and felt more secure and happy,” says Anna Gund. “But in cases where they have not done so, patients were negative. The feedback that is required is to have someone look at the information submitted and provide answers to questions.”

She has also performed a questionnaire survey regarding what care workers think about using ICT support in their work. It showed that they are generally very interested and have considerable confidence in the technology. But in practice it turned out that while some staff used Care@Distance as it was intended, others did not. Anna Gund will try to find out why this was the case in her future research. She also wants to study how Care@Distance impacts the economics of care and care outcomes.

The idea is not for Care@Distance to replace human contact. Instead, it should be a complement that improves care within existing economic frameworks and that enhances dialog and quality of life.

Families with newborn infants that need care often fare better if they can be at home as much as possible. Care@Distance makes this possible because care workers can provide support with improved monitoring and dialog.

“What’s more, quite a few dangerous diseases and resistant bacteria are spread at hospitals,” says Anna Gund. “You avoid these in the home.”

She also tested video telephony with Skype to enhance communication between [parents](#) and care workers, and this tool was greatly appreciated.

Provided by Chalmer's University of Technology

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