

Remote technologies help occupational therapists get patients home quicker

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Using remote consultation technology to assess a patient's home environment allowed for quicker hospital discharge and freed up staff time for other care, according to new research published by the

University of Sheffield and Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The paper is published in the *Journal of Medical Engineering & Technology*.

The remote technological solution, which was designed and tested pre-pandemic, enabled home visit assessments to be carried out more quickly. It also decreased staff travel time and helped family members and caregivers, who do not always live near the relatives or loved ones, participate in assessments without the need for them to travel.

Home visit assessments are undertaken by [occupational therapists](#) to ensure that patients, such as those who have had a stroke, are able to live as an independent a life as possible through adaptations to their [home environment](#) such as fitting handrails.

However, the research also identified some limitations which would need to be considered for each patient. This included the reliability and security of [internet connection](#), digital exclusion and the difficulty of checking for certain environmental hazards without in-person visits. New guidelines on the technology's use have now been published by the research team.

Vitaveska Lanfranchi, Senior Lecturer in Medical Computing from the University of Sheffield's Department of Computer Science, who helped design and evaluate the prototype virtual home assessment tool, said, "Telehealth technology can support efficient and effective healthcare. It can enable people to be more involved in their consultations, and in managing their health. Our guidelines were informed by the experience of service users and professionals. We hope they will guide the development of home assessment tools."

Natalie Jones, Clinical Academic Occupational Therapist, and principal investigator of the study, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, noted, "There has been a rapid increase in the use of technology and virtual home assessments in the last few years, in part accelerated by the pandemic. Although this study was undertaken prior to COVID, our findings provide a vital picture of how virtual home assessments are used, what public perceptions are and what barriers to implementation can be. We hope this insight will support future studies and enable clinicians to consider the advantages and challenges of using the technology in this way."

More information: V. Lanfranchi et al, User attitudes towards virtual home assessment technologies, *Journal of Medical Engineering & Technology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/03091902.2022.2089250](https://doi.org/10.1080/03091902.2022.2089250)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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