

Western District Health Service

Virtual Visiting Program: Case Studies

The Virtual Visiting Program in aged care facilities aims to improve aged care resident's quality of life through:

- Increasing resident socialisation with regular visits from family and friends and the capacity to reconnect with children and grandchildren,
- Enabling family and friends to visit more regularly with the aid of the internet, and
- Providing a visual reassurance to family and friends of the quality of care their loved one is receiving whilst at an aged care facility.

Case Study 1:

Resident in Warrnambool → Brother in England

Resident's Profile	<p>Nan is an 87 year old who was born in England. She has been at the aged care facility since Oct '09, is fragile aged and walks with the assistance of a walking frame. She is quietly spoken though is able to communicate clearly.</p> <p>She has no family in Warrnambool but has a cousin that lives in Melbourne and a brother and his family in England. She and her brother have not seen each other for 14 years.</p> <p>The cousin contacted the facility to initiate a virtual visit with the resident's brother after the virtual visiting program was advertised in a newsletter distributed by the aged care facility.</p> <p>Nan walks to the Resident's Internet Cafe (room with 2 computers that is able to be closed for privacy) where Skype, a webcam and a computer is setup for the regular virtual visit with her brother. A visit with her niece (brother's daughter) directly follows the visit with her brother.</p>
Benefits to the resident and their family and friends	<p>Through the virtual visiting program the resident and her family have been reunited after 14 years apart. These visits have become a regular part of the resident's routine and through these visits she becomes very animated and excited prior to and during the visits. As a normally quietly spoken lady, the aged care facility say they are delighted to see her big smiles during the virtual visits and to see her look so happy.</p> <p>The brother has thanked the facility "a thousand times over" for enabling them to keep in touch over such a vast distance. He has said that this is a really important link for them all, they look forward to it and it makes their week to be able to see her!</p>
What the aged care facility says about virtual visiting	<p>The staff at the aged care facility, and in particular, the diversional therapist who manages the virtual visiting program locally, says it "tugs at her heart strings" to be involved in this program.</p> <p>She feels immensely proud to assist families, who are separated by great distances, be able to see and hear each other and know how they are all faring.</p>

Case Study 2:

Resident in Warrnambool → Daughter in Melbourne

<p>Resident's Profile</p>	<p>Joan is an 83 year old. She has been at the aged care facility since Sept '07. She is fragile aged and is non ambulant.</p> <p>She has a sister that lives in a nearby town that visits the aged care facility each week. The sister travels by bus to visit her and they are very close. The resident has family in Melbourne – a daughter who has recently had treatment for breast cancer and has been unable to travel to visit her mother at the facility, and a great-grandson who recently required major surgery.</p> <p>The sister contacted the facility to initiate a virtual visit with the resident's daughter once her treatment for breast cancer commenced after the virtual visiting program was advertised in a newsletter distributed by the aged care facility.</p> <p>Nan is taken to the Resident's Internet Cafe in a wheelchair (room with 2 computers that is able to be closed for privacy) where Skype, a webcam and a computer is setup for the weekly visit with her daughter. This coincides with the sister's weekly visit so they can all talk and meet together.</p>
<p>Benefits to the resident and their family and friends</p>	<p>The virtual visiting program has enabled this family to visit each other during very stressful times of their lives. The resident was able to see her daughter's cancer treatment progression from being very sick and unable to get out of bed, to treatment beginning and seeing her hair growing back, to being well enough and sitting in front of the computer talking to her mother and aunt and finally, seeing her well enough to be able to return to work at the end of the treatment.</p> <p>The virtual visiting program also enabled the resident to see her great-grandson before and after his major surgery and to see how he is recovering for herself which she has been delighted to witness!</p> <p>Prior to the virtual visits, the resident gets very verbal and looks forward to them with great excitement. There is always lots of laughter during the visits and there have been plenty of tears shed too. It has been a very bonding time for the family and brought them all closer together that phone calls would not have been able to achieve. The visual component of the virtual visits has been a very important factor for the resident to be able to see for herself how her daughter is recovering.</p> <p>The resident's family all bought webcams for each other for Christmas and with a granddaughter in Perth, she loves the extra visits she is now getting from her family.</p>
<p>What the aged care facility says about virtual visiting</p>	<p>The virtual visits that occur with this family play a very special part at the facility. They feel they too have been a part of the daughter's progress watching and seeing the resident through the virtual visits.</p> <p>It is common during the visits for there to be so much laughter, tears and general commotion between the resident, sister and daughter that the staff stop and see what is going on!</p> <p>The diversional therapist who manages the Virtual Visiting Program at the aged care facility says she "cries just about every time there is a visit" and "it's just so good to be able to bring the resident and her family together".</p>

Case Study 3:

Virtual Quizzes between aged care facilities

What virtual quizzes are	<p>Virtual quizzes are conducted between aged care facilities based on a one to one connection.</p> <p>For some facilities, their computer and webcam is setup on a trolley so it can be wheeled around. Others have a monitor mounted on a wall in an open area shared by the residents.</p> <p>The virtual quizzes allow the residents to be in a group setting and to use and experience the technology required for virtual visiting. This has proved to be very successful with residents who are unfamiliar with these technologies and who would have only ever communicated with family and friends face to face or by telephone. "Seeing" someone on a computer has been a very exciting and novel experience for them!</p>
What staff say about virtual quizzes	<p>Most staff at the aged care facilities say that they were initially anxious about using the technologies of virtual visiting as generally they were not especially computer savvy. Computer competency and confidence of the staff does vary between facilities. Computer use by staff mainly involves generating newsletters, flyers etc for families, entering patient data onto computer programs and using the internet for basic surfing.</p> <p>The staff say that hosting and participating in virtual quizzes between facilities has enabled them to become familiar with using the technologies without the added pressure of having family or friends waiting on the other end. They have been able to provide assistance and learn from each other, which has helped with their computer competence and confidence enormously. They have also said that professional relationships have been formed that would not have occurred otherwise.</p> <p>As one staff member has said about one particular virtual quiz between their site in Wangaratta and Portland, "the group activity (which included 2 residents in wheelchairs) where both sides participated in the virtual quiz, we had one resident at Wangaratta answering all the questions even for the ones for Portland. Second half of the quiz was music and piano playing and both sides broke out into a sing-along. We had laughs as we watched Nurses popping up in Portland in front of the residents waving to us, the resident in Portland was pinching the Nurses on the backside to move out of the way".</p> <p>Staff say it is great to see how much pleasure the residents get out the virtual quizzes.</p>

Lessons learnt from the Virtual Visiting Program

As the service uses concepts and technologies that residents, family & friends and staff are potentially unfamiliar with, there are a number of key elements that need to be considered when implementing virtual visiting.

Lessons learnt	Outcomes
1. Expectations with regards to number of visits from residents and family & friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up realistic time frames for visits bearing in mind time zone differences for overseas calls• Discuss frequency of visits with residents and families
2. Preparation required for a virtual visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a main person responsible at each site for the Virtual Visiting Program to ensure consistency with residents, family and friends• Give residents adequate time to prepare for a virtual visit depending on their physical and mental condition• Consider advice from family and friends when assessing how the resident may (or may not) react to a visit• Ensure that the visit is in a quiet area of the facility so resident is properly able to hear and see
3. Technical glitches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure a user's guide is available on operating the software and is kept up to date• Ensure staff are familiar with the program setup and technical requirements, particularly to assist after hours
4. Notification process for visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure family and friends are aware of the processes involved in notifying facilities of a visit

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