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Press Release 01/10/2020

The CONTACT Trial

CONtact TrAcing in Care homes using digital Technology

Researchers from the School of Healthcare, Leeds Institute for Clinical Trials Research and the School of Engineering at the University of Leeds, in partnership with the University of Nottingham, Tech industry (Microshare inc.), carehome providers and Local Authority public health have begun a £1.6m trial, funded by the National Institute of Health Research. The CONTACT trial will test whether wearable digital devices improves contact tracing in care homes, reduces COVID-19 infections and untimely deaths, and provides the possibility of homes opening up to family, community and healthcare professionals. Initial feasibility work starts in two Leeds care homes from 1st October until Christmas, with the main trial of 64 care homes in West Yorkshire and the East Midlands commencing early in 2021.

NHS Test and Trace or local public health team contact tracing can be difficult, expensive, and often results in homes simply being closed to visitors, and resident's freedoms restricted. In the CONTACT trial, residents, staff and visitors in 32 care homes will wear small digital 'tokens' (like a fitbit or small watch) that capture contacts between people immediately and allow researchers and the care homes to identify a month's contacts almost immediately. These will be compared to another 32 homes that don't use the technology. Homes using the digital 'tokens' will receive personalised analysis and feedback on patterns and trends of contacts and infections in their home and will be able to pinpoint the contact 'hot spots' in their homes and better monitor their infection control procedures. All this information that will allow homes, NHS Test and Trace and Local Public Health teams to respond more effectively.

"This study could significantly improve the quality of life for the people in our care. Safety is of the utmost importance but the ease and simplicity of the device could be game changing for us. To have detailed data to inform our infection , prevention and control allows us to make better informed decisions around visiting - improving safety and the quality of lives for the people we support."
Cyd Akrill MBE, Director of Nursing, Springfield Healthcare Group

With up to 30,000 resident deaths, 80% infection rates, and total lock downs in many homes in the first wave of the pandemic, the CONTACT trial will thoroughly test a means for homes to rethink managing infection risk and control and consider opening up once more to communities, families and healthcare professionals.

"Care homes continue to be one of the settings worst hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Interventions that may reduce the risk to residents and staff in care homes are important to understand and evaluate. We hope this trial will provide "real-world" evidence on a tech-based supplement to traditional contact tracing, that ultimately could be beneficial in our local efforts to reduce the impact of COVID-19."
Dr Tom Hall, Director of Public Health, South Tyneside Council.

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CONTACT is a ground-breaking partnership between industry, universities and social care, that uses technology to improve the quantity and quality of contact trace information available to homes, local public health and NHS Test and Trace.

Notes to Editors:

The CONTACT trial is led by Professor Carl Thompson
https://medicinehealth.leeds.ac.uk/healthcare/staff/816/professor-carl-thompson

The research team involves world leading clinical trials (led by Professor Amanda Farrin at the Clinical Trials Research Unit) and care home research (Professor Karen Spilsbury) expertise, the president of the British Geriatric Society (Professor Adam Gordon, Nottingham); SAGE advisory group member Professor Cath Noakes, Engineering, Leeds; care home providers Westward care and Springfield Healthcare and South Tyneside Local Authority Director of Public Health, Dr Tom Hall.

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