

DIGITAL HEROES ARE THE RIGHT PRESCRIPTION



New attitudes, partnerships and digital tools have created a culture shift at Woffington House in Tredegar, South Wales. Staff are now reaching for a very different type of tablet.

All residents at Woffington House have dementia or Alzheimer's. Four years ago, the home had the highest rate of falls and highest callout rate to the Welsh Ambulance Service in the borough. This was in part because of the use of anti-psychotic medication, prescribed to the residents as a sedative, taken if and when they become distressed.

When Adam Hesselden joined as the new care home manager, he wanted to change the culture at Woffington House, reducing the use of medication and finding new ways to help residents with their health and wellbeing.

He sought external initiatives and partnerships that would transform the day-to-day lives of residents, and digital technologies soon became an integral factor.

Woffington House was the first care home in Wales to sign up to the Digital Inclusion Charter, an initiative from Digital Communities Wales which asks organisations to sign up to simple ways of helping digitally excluded people enjoy the benefits of the internet.

Care home staff have been trained to use iPads with residents to research their hobbies and interests and young people from local schools visit regularly as 'Digital Heroes'.



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Three residents at Woffington House – Tom, Herbert and Jim – used to perform together in the Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir and they have maintained a friendship at the care home. During one visit by the school children, a student helped them to use the iPad to find footage of the choir singing on YouTube. All the gentlemen were amazed and delighted to spot themselves in the video.

Tom, who is 92, is still very fond of singing, which he now does every time he watches the YouTube video.

Tom comments: “I love it when the Digital Heroes from Georgetown school visit, I have made a new friend, Daniel, and he shows me the plants I used to grow and shares with me videos of my time in the Tredegar Orpheus.”

Adam says: “Tom is so much happier when he uses the iPad to listen to his music. His favourite song is Calon Lan and he really belts it out!”

Tom also uses the iPad to chat with his daughter on FaceTime, as she lives far away from the home. Adam continues: “Because he can see her, he speaks to her as if she is in the room and with him. It makes a big difference.”

As well as iPads, Woffington House invested in virtual reality (VR) headsets, which give the residents an immersive virtual experience in a location that they choose.

One resident, John, was a soldier in his younger years and fought in what was then Malaya. He likes to be reminded of the palm trees and beaches, and so he goes to Malaysia via Google Earth. Holding a member of staff's hand, he walks around exploring the scenery.

Adam says digital technologies “have become the glue between our residents and the children that come and visit us”.

“They have so much to offer in digital skills and are able to help our residents research their interests,” he says. “And we have older people with huge amounts of life experience and knowledge to share. It is supporting the younger generation in becoming



ethically informed citizens and you can see how much both sides get from the sessions.”

The number of falls at Woffington House reduced by 30% in 2018. Also, residents at the care home have stopped using what are known as PRN medications – drugs taken as and when needed in order to cope with anxiety and stress.

While these changes are down to the holistic approach to dementia care adopted by Woffington House, the role of technology is significant.

As Adam explains: “We are using iPads and Amazon Echo Dots [voice activated smart speakers] and intergenerational befriending instead of medication.”

When residents become distressed, staff take a personal approach to supporting them, often using technology to unlock happy and comforting memories.

“Our residents can get very upset and confused, they might bang on doors and shout at the windows, wanting to know why they are here,” Adam explains. “Before we began on our digital journey, the response was to reach for the medication if we weren't able to comfort them. Now, we can reach for the iPad and spend quality time with them, sharing very special memories which are a comfort and a distraction.”

Senior clinical nurses within the Aneurin University Health Board have said Woffington House is “setting the bar” when it comes to dementia care in Wales and family members have given extremely positive feedback to Adam.

“When someone says: ‘I've got my mum back’ – we know it's making a difference.”