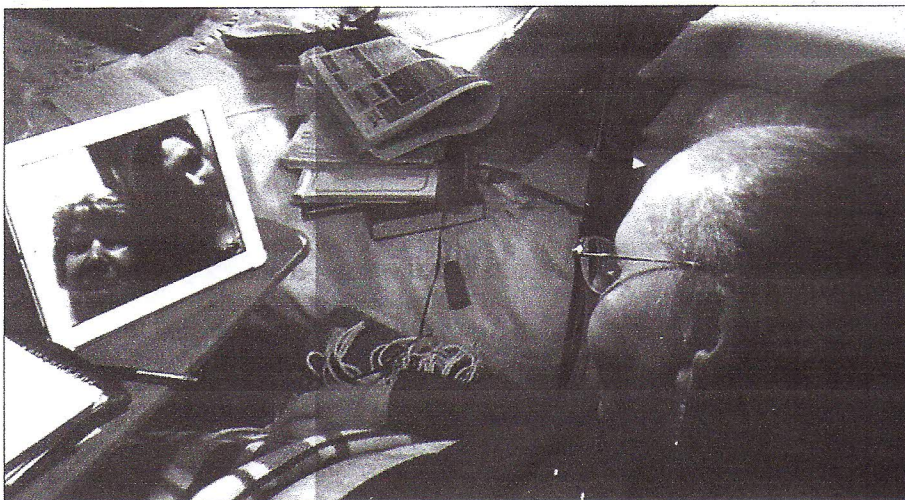


Crosshill benefiting from technology



A resident connecting with family using Skype on a computer.

CROSSHILL care home in Stanhope is embracing all that new technology has to offer for the benefit of their residents.

Apart from a complete refurbishment, including redecoration of their bedrooms, the owners have also installed a new sensory room. This is an intimate space, with a false ceiling filled with sparkling lights. There is a DVD/CD player for restful music and old films that can often spark memories. Mainly for dementia patients, the room also acts as a treatment room for relaxing massages.

The facilities at Crosshill are now also open to a small number of visiting day care patients. Pauline is one of those who accesses such things as hairdressing when she visits on Thursdays. Maria Vincent, the Director of Nursing, who is the daughter of the founders and was a senior cancer nurse in Newcastle, said that Pauline was a resident who the home assisted to rehabilitate thus enabling her to return home. "She comes back to see us every Thursday because Thursday is our baking day and she likes to bake," said Maria. Pauline said she thoroughly enjoys coming back every week. "I look forward to it," she said.

Technology is also making a favourable impact on other aspects of the lives of residents who are now able to use

the world wide web and in particular, Skype, which is free to access anywhere within the home. Skype, and face time, are programmes that can be accessed by computer. They are like a visual telephone call where residents and relatives (locally, nationally and internationally) can make contact, talking and seeing see each other simultaneously, which is particularly useful for those who have problems with their hearing. "I am sure it will prove to be invaluable this winter," said Maria, "when relatives are unable to get here to visit because of the bad weather. It is also available on Sundays when some relatives can't get public transport to the home. We had one Skype call to Canada where the son of a resident showed his mother around his house, somewhere she had not seen before. It is comforting for both sides to see and talk to each other."

Barbara is one resident who enjoys using Skype. "Oh it's marvellous," she said. "Last time I went on it to see the family, my grandson was there and popped his head round to say hello." Staff said it was lovely to see how happy she was at being able to talk to various members of the family and she was so engrossed she hardly noticed that they had been speaking for almost an hour and a half.

Crosshill is a permanent home for many of its residents and the home tries to make their lives as comfortable and interesting as possible. The staff ratio is higher than many other similar establishments, and there is a qualified nurse on the premises 24 hours a day. The home employs three activity co-ordinators who organise all manner of events as well as inviting visiting speakers and entertainers. Recent visits have included a harpist, a spinner and in the past they have had visits from singers and even a pony! They also have a visiting pantomime every year and social events are open to the local community, family and friends.

There is always something going on and there is an emphasis on personalised care. One resident, who is being prepared to return home has had a mock kitchen area installed in her bedroom so she can be assessed and helped to undertake some activities such as making herself a cup of tea and a simple snack.

Maria explained, "Sometimes home care can only include short 15 to 30 minute visits, which really isn't enough time to address all of an individuals needs. If we can assist someone to regain their ability and confidence in performing a few tasks then there is a greater likelihood that they will be able to safely return to their own home and do so for a longer period of time."

The home employs over 40 local people, including qualified nurses, care staff, house-keepers, activities, cooks and maintenance workers. "80% of our income goes back in wages, which is much higher than some private care homes, but we feel it is integral to the high quality of care we are able to provide to all of our residents ... my parents have always instilled into us that everyone deserves high quality care and none more so than our older people who have, after all, given us all so much." added Maria.

The home is a happy one for both residents and staff, a home from home and a great asset to Weardale, allowing Dalefolk somewhere to live for the remainder of their lives if necessary.