



# Creating a supportive 'knowledge network' through the pandemic for Worcestershire's care homes, via the ECHO<sup>®</sup> platform

In March 2020, care homes in Worcestershire – and across the country – began to struggle as a result of the pandemic. They faced issues including: difficulty sourcing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); reduced staffing due to Covid-19; and the virus sweeping through homes with highly vulnerable residents.

Contact with the county's homes became increasingly difficult, as lockdown measures were put in place across the country. Dr Maggie Keeble, Care Home GP Lead at Worcestershire's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), contacted St Richard's Hospice as she had identified the difficulties faced by the county's care homes. She saw the importance of opening a regular line of contact with the homes, and a platform to support them through the pandemic. As host to an Extension of Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO<sup>®</sup>) Hub, St Richard's was well placed to support this call-to-action.

## What is ECHO<sup>®</sup>?

ECHO<sup>®</sup> enables healthcare professionals to share specialist knowledge in end-of-life care with staff working in care homes, domiciliary care, and primary care networks via video conferencing software.



meetings – ensuring all submitted questions were answered by the panel. Between April 2020 and August 2020, 790 people attended the meetings.

## Developing our support

St Richard's Hospice moved on to create a Palliative Care Knowledge Network Programme for care home staff. To date, it has delivered five cohorts, with a total of 351 attendees.

An eight-week programme ran for care home managers, including sessions on managing family dynamics, and advice on working well with GPs as residents approach the end of their life.

The hospice delivered two manager cohorts. Alongside this, St Richard's ran two, eight-week programmes for health care support workers, covering basics such as skin care at the end of life.

In addition, the team held a 16-week programme for Registered Nurses covering basic care items alongside sessions on Advance Care Planning and managing pain at the end-of-life.

The hospice also delivered training in verification of expected death. Overall, St Richard's has reached 1,259 care home staff since the start of the pandemic.



## Conclusion

Project ECHO<sup>®</sup> uses a 'learning loop' approach: specialist teams and local providers learn from each other by problem-solving real-time experiences, and sharing best practice.

The aim is to enhance decision making and transform service delivery. Through its work with care homes, St Richard's has displayed the ECHO<sup>®</sup> ethos at its best.

While ECHO<sup>®</sup> immersion training – which all hubs are required to attend – advises a structured format to meetings, St Richard's was forced to adapt the process to meet the desperate need through the pandemic. Residents were dying, information was needed, and an innovative approach to how the

homes could be supported was urgently required. As a result of its innovations, St Richard's was able to help provide crucial support to care home staff when they needed it most.

Additional innovations are in the pipeline for further collaborative working with care homes in the county.

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