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## **Project Synopsis:**

### **Quality of Life and Healthcare Communication in a Global Community**

#### **Telemedicine Strand**

The Health Communication Research Centre (HCRC), as an interdisciplinary initiative within Cardiff University, co-ordinates communication and discourse based research in areas of health and social care. In association with the Centre for Language and Communication Research, we are part of a 5-year research programme in *Language and Global Communication* (funded by The Leverhulme Trust, 2001-2006, amounting to 1.2 million pounds).

The strand in telemedicine (to include e-health, cybermedicine) will examine the role of alternative means through which health care and health information are being delivered in the UK and elsewhere – via Websites, Call Centres, NHS Direct, Walk-in Centres. These new modes of delivery are as much a response to chronic difficulties within public healthcare systems (e.g., longer waiting periods, staff shortages, patients' indifference etc) as they are a sign of the times, facilitating immediate and equal access to health information and advice. This changing scenario also marks a shift from treatment and cure to prevention and enhancement of quality of life. While patients/clients are being seen as taking control of their wellbeing, these developments amount to a provision of nurse-led health care.

Recent surveys of existing services (such as NHS Direct) have shown that easy access to health information/advice has attracted different groups of healthcare users (especially young adults), who in the past rarely visited GP surgeries. There seems to be a prevalence of calls for certain types of concerns (e.g., sexually transmitted diseases, topical issues such as outbreaks of meningitis, risks associated with MMR vaccines etc). In this study we are seeking to find out the ways in which telemedicine will or will not make a difference towards the future healthcare services. Our data will consist of organisational literature (how these services are being marketed); professional accounts of the day-to-day challenges; the recorded calls; and finally, what the users of these services may have to say about their experiences.

The key research questions are:

- How do professionals manage clinical and communicative aspects of the calls? To what extent do software packages aid this process? What challenges do professional call-takers routinely face in their work?
- How are information and advice sequences interactionally accomplished during calls?
- What extra demands are made on health professionals and clients at the language / communication level? How can research findings on face-to-face and telephone mediated interaction be applied to this new setting?
- How are calls initiated and routed? What decisions (shared or otherwise) are reached for individual callers? How do professional call-takers mediate between allied health care services?
- How are descriptions of pain/suffering attempted in these settings and are responded to? What forms of reassurance do clients seek and what reassurance can health professionals potentially offer?
- What views do other health professionals (e.g., General Practitioners and other medical specialists) have about the usefulness of such services?
- What views do institutional and organisational representatives hold about current practices and future developments in this sector?

We aim to liaise with various public-sector agencies (e.g., NHS Direct Wales, Tenovus Cancer Information Centre, Telephone Helplines Association, Royal College of General Practitioners) for whom our findings will have practical relevance.

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