

For more information please contact:
Shannon Gillespie 0207480 4892
Website: www.bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk

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New cardiac technology saves lives

Cardiac patients at risk of death from sudden heart failure are reclaiming their lives thanks to new life-saving technology being offered to hundreds of patients at Barts and The London NHS Trust.

Cardiac specialists can now remotely monitor patients thanks to a new defibrillator which relays information about their heart rhythm back to the hospital from anywhere in the UK via a monitor in the home.

Abnormal rhythms can be checked by specialists at the earliest stage, giving patients peace of mind and allowing doctors to re-call and treat them before they reach the stage of having a heart attack.

On Monday 8 March 2010, Health Minister Baroness Thornton will meet the clinical staff at St Bartholomew's Hospital who have been behind the rapid roll-out of the remote monitoring as part of a wider NHS focus on cost-effective clinical improvements and increasing services for patient home-care.

She will also talk to Maureen Hancocks, a patient whose life has been transformed after she had one of the bi-vent implantable cardioverter-defibrillators fitted.

"You can't put a price on life, which is exactly what this device has given back to me," Mrs Hancocks said.

"Before having the monitor I couldn't do anything as my family and I were constantly worried that at any time I may have a heart attack. Now if I feel unwell at any point, I can call the hospital team who monitor my heart rhythm and check everything is ok.

"It means I can do the things I enjoy and spend time with my family without constantly worrying, knowing a team of experts are watching over me at all times and are just a phone call away.

She explained: "I live in Essex, 51 miles from Barts, so the monitor also means I don't have to travel to and from my home to London for regular check-ups."

Professor Richard Schilling, a consultant cardiologist at Barts and The London NHS Trust, said such developments in cardiac treatment were enabling the NHS to deliver best care and cutting-edge technology to the population of East London, especially to those from low socio-economic backgrounds and minority groups.

"This has been a real team effort from the NHS to make first-rate care widely accessible to all residents of East London, regardless of wealth or background.

"Barts and The London NHS Trust has received invaluable support from the Department of Health (DOH) as well as crucial funding from the local primary care trusts," Professor Schilling said.

"Barts and The London is the first NHS Trust to exceed national targets set by the Department of Health, successfully implanting more defibrillators than any other trust – a procedure which saves lives.

"This is a clear illustration of how the NHS can work to deliver best-practice clinical care and of the positive impact our cardiac services are having within the community.

"The defibrillators themselves are a relatively new technology that detects life-threatening heart rhythm problems and delivers a shock to re-start the heart and save the patient's life.

"Being able to remotely monitor patients takes this technology to a whole new level, as we are able to identify heart irregularities before it elevates to a level requiring a shock, giving the patients peace of mind and significant time and cost savings, not to mention possibly saving their life."