

# Now you can make your visits virtual with our connectivity

Find out how we helped Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to get hundreds of free connections to people in need across Wales



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Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) is the largest health organisation in Wales, providing primary, community, mental health, and acute hospital services.

When the COVID-19 crisis hit the UK, the organisation was faced with reconfiguring wards and setting up three emergency field hospitals, all while continuing to provide the best care possible to over half a million people in North Wales.

This included finding innovative ways for older people and vulnerable people to continue to see their loved ones, at a time when they needed them most.

Working with Vodafone, BCUHB got 100 free connections, and over 250 connections on Vodafone's Emergency Tariff, giving hundreds of people the chance to connect.



“

We had good wireless connectivity on most of our sites, but we didn't want to make any assumptions on connectivity in care homes or in peoples' homes, so we recognised we needed good data coverage. The number of connections Vodafone generously donated, and so quickly, was amazing, and was hugely appreciated by the project teams.”

**Brian Laing**  
**Informatics Project Manager**  
**Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB)**

## Challenge

### The impact of lockdown

Anyone who's ever been to see a relative in hospital or checked in on a loved one in a care home, will know how important these visits are. A break in the day. Someone to talk to. A lifeline.

During the Coronavirus pandemic some of these visits have no longer been able to take place. This could have left many older and vulnerable people, isolated from friends and family.

“When we were aware that decisions would have to be made to restrict and prevent visiting at our hospital sites, we identified that we would need a solution to deploy very quickly, which would enable our patients to keep in touch with their loved ones,” explains Brian Laing, Informatics Project Manager at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).

But at the point COVID struck, BCUHB's IT team were also heavily involved in supporting ward reconfigurations, ward moves, and the unenviable task of commissioning three field hospitals.

“We needed to deliver an effective and rapid deployment project with minimal impact on our IT teams.” says Sharon Smith, Senior Informatics Improvement Facilitator at BCUHB.

With such a large multi-disciplinary and geographically diverse organisation, they needed to find a solution that would work for as many areas of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board as possible.

“It was important that any investment of charitable funds would provide benefit to our patients long after the COVID pandemic,” adds Brian. “We have an eye on the future. And digital health, telehealth and those types of services, will become a fast-emerging market, post-COVID and beyond.”

## Solution

### 100 free connections

BCUHB worked with several partners, including the Welsh Government, the Regional Partnership Board, Macmillan and Welsh NHS Charity Awyrlas, who got together hundreds of tablets that could be distributed to hospitals, care homes, and people in the community who needed them most.

But the devices were just half the solution. Now, the board needed connectivity.

"We just reached out and asked if there were any suppliers who'd be able to help us?" says Brian. "Vodafone very quickly came back to us. And to be honest, they went above and beyond."

Vodafone immediately supplied 100 connections free of charge for six months. Along with over 250 Unlimited Emergency Tariff SIMs, at a discounted rate.

"We had good wireless connectivity on most of our sites, but we didn't want to make any assumptions on connectivity in care homes or in peoples' homes, so we recognised that we needed good data coverage," says Brian. "The number of connections Vodafone generously donated and so quickly, was amazing, and was hugely appreciated by the project teams."

The tablets and connectivity were sent out with an easy-to-use guide to help users get set-up. And for anyone who needed a bit of extra support, the clinicians were happy to lend a hand.

Applications like Skype, FaceTime and Zoom were all pre-installed to enable people to contact friends and family right away. Along with bookmarks for useful pages like Attend Anywhere, the national solution for remote GP consultations.

## Benefit

### Virtual visitations

It might just be a tablet and a SIM card to some, but to those people who were told they couldn't see their loved ones, this connectivity was a window to the outside world.

"One lady was in hospital on her 100th birthday," recalls Sharon. "She was able to see her children and her grandchildren over video call, and they were just so happy to be able to celebrate such a milestone birthday together."

"There was also a gentleman who was able to speak to his brother in Canada," adds Sharon. "He hadn't seen him face to face for 18 years, so that was really powerful."

With hundreds of older and vulnerable people connected already, BCUHB hope that the project will continue to have wider impact and kick-start other projects too.

"It's likely that remote consultations with GP's or visits to hospital outpatients clinics, will increasingly be offered as an available option," says Brian. "Why struggle with public transport, or to find a car-parking space, if the services can be provided online and the patient would prefer the convenience of this type of service?"

BCUHB are also hoping projects like this will help tackle digital exclusion across Wales, particularly in the areas of Mental Health and Learning Disabilities.

"I'm hopeful that as we emerge from this global pandemic, that the NHS will continue with the momentum it has made on it's digital transformation journey," concludes Brian. "We have many of the tools and a growing appetite for change, so hopefully we'll be pushing an open door."

## Why Vodafone?

- Vodafone responded quickly to BCUHB's request and immediately supplied 100 connections free of charge for six months
- Over 250 Unlimited Emergency Tariff SIMs were also provided to the board at a discounted rate
- The connections have enabled hundreds of older people across North Wales to keep in touch with loved ones during the pandemic
- The connectivity has also opened the door to the prospect for other technology projects at BCUHB, and started them on their digital journey

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**Sharon Smith**  
Senior Informatics Improvement Facilitator  
Betsi Cadwaladr University  
Health Board (BCUHB)



## Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) is the largest health organisation in Wales, with over 17,000 staff, and serving over half a million people across North Wales. As well as three main hospital sites in Bangor, Bodelwyddan and Wrexham, BCUHB are responsible for community hospitals, health centres, clinics, mental health units, community teams, GP practices and other NHS services provided by dentists, opticians and pharmacists.

[www.bcuhb.nhs.wales.co.uk](http://www.bcuhb.nhs.wales.co.uk)

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