

January 7, 2012

High-tech monitoring a small price to pay

By: Gillian Slade

Medicine Hat News

One Hat family says technology that enables seniors to continue living in their own homes is well worth the cost of the products and a monthly monitoring fee.

The cost of central monitoring for Emma Edvardson, 91, and her husband Leonard Edvardson, 90, when the pilot program is over, could run anywhere from \$50 to \$200 per month, says their daughter Evelyn Fried.

"We Care charges \$648 for care for a 24 hour period," said Fried. "This technology is well worth it."

The technology in the Edvardson's home allows Fried to sleep in her own home and monitor her cell phone during the night to ensure her parents are safe and not in need of her attention.

The Edvardson's have a bed sensor that is triggered when someone gets in or out of bed. There are sensors on all the doors to the exterior of the home to raise an alert if they go outside. There is a camera in the bedroom focused on the pillow area of the bed and another in the living room showing the couple's favourite chairs. Only Fried has access to those images available on her cell phone.

A year long pilot project that saw monitoring equipment installed in 42 Hat homes is drawing to a close. It came about as a result of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology looking at ways to attract technology to Alberta and Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services (AHS) expressing an interest in examining if this technology was a way to allow seniors to stay in their own homes for longer.

A Request for Proposals was implemented and three different private companies selected, explained Cheryl Knight, executive director provincial seniors health team. The range of products, slightly different for each company, had already been tried and tested by the individual companies and was market ready. The pilot project in Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie was to determine the value for Alberta seniors and whether there are benefits to making this widely available in Alberta.

Homes to try the technology were selected by AHS Home Care staff who make regular visits to the homes of the elderly who need assistance. They were in an ideal position to know who was likely to benefit from using the technology, said Amanda Chynoweth, Home Care. The products did not require any understanding of the technology or active participation by the senior on a daily basis. The process was explained to them prior to them deciding if they wanted to participate.

"No senior had any product put into their home if they did not understand the implication or reasons," said Knight.

Feedback received from family members has been positive. In general they felt the technology gave them an understanding of the day to day activities of the senior and how well they were coping.

"They've found visits with their parents are now social rather than a means of checking on how they are coping on a day to day basis," said Knight.

For some it helped to determine that moving to a long-term care facility was what their loved one needed.

The cost of the project is well within the budget of the estimated \$1.9 million, said Knight.

The researchers involved in the program are in the process of finalizing data collection. The final report on the project will probably be submitted to government in March and released to the public at a later date.