

Hi-tech medical scheme miles better for many

Diagnoses made from a distance

A PIONEERING scheme to treat patients via video-link could be rolled out across the world after a North-east trial.

The Presence project could see patients receiving expert medical treatment from doctors hundreds of miles away.



By Kirsty Taylor

The new equipment provides a direct video-link with a doctor.

It also has medical equipment which can measure blood pressure, temperature, pulse rate and how much oxygen is in the blood.

It is hoped a trained operator will soon be able to help people use the equipment at local community portals throughout the North-east, to contact doctors without travelling.

Experts hope to eventually take the scheme to people's own homes as the technology advances.

The scheme being piloted at Aberdeen Royal Infir-

mary has gained international interest since it started earlier this year.

Patients visiting the hospital's out-of-hours service are being asked to test run the system, called Cisco's HealthPresence.

Cameras, stethoscopes and otoscopes – which look in ears, noses and throats – are used to help provide the doctor with a detailed record of the patient without even being in the same room.

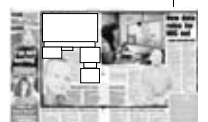
"It feels like face to face"

Jim Ferguson, consultant for emergency medicine and clinical leader at the Scottish Centre for Telehealth, said the system had given very accurate diagnosis so far.

He said: "We are halfway through the study and have already had 36 patients use the equipment.

"I think it will definitely be used in clinical examinations.

"It is very high quality and very high definition – it feels like you



are speaking to someone face to face.

"We are the first to have put patients through a pilot and we have had so many expressions of interest from all sorts of areas.

"We have had visits from medical professionals from all of the home nations, most of Europe and America."

Videoconferencing booths are already used at 14 of NHS

Grampian's community hospitals, the main centres being Banff, Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Huntly and Turriff.

But these only deal with minor injuries. The new equipment can

also help with skin infections, viral illness and chesty coughs.

Videoconferencing has already saved time and money for emergency services. 65 transfers had been saved in the last three years by someone in Aberdeen examining workers on oil rigs.

Booths cost around £5,000 and the equipment could cost between £10,000 and £12,000.

The study aims to get 100 out-of-hours patients to test the equipment at ARI's A&E department.



SUCCESS: A large, high-definition screen is part of the equipment trialed by Jim Ferguson, right, at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.





'Equipment was amazing'

AN EAR infection led Andrew Beattie to become a medical pioneer – as the nine-year-old took part in a pilot of new videoconferencing equipment. Kaimhill Primary pupil Andrew was taken to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary by mum Linda when his earache got bad one evening. But instead of going to the normal out-of-hours service at

the hospital's John Anderson Building, Andrew was invited to take part in the HealthPresence pilot running in the A&E department.

Andrew, left, was first diagnosed by a doctor using the video-link. A researcher used equipment with a camera on it to show the GP in a different room the infected ear so he could make his diagnosis. Another GP then examined him face-to-face to make sure the diagnosis matched the one

decided upon using the hi-tech equipment.

Mum Linda, who lives in Garthdee, said: "The equipment was amazing – the screen was huge so it was almost like talking to the doctor face-to-face.

"I would definitely be happy to use the equipment when it is ready to go out to people's homes. "You know that you can go and see the doctor in person if the system isn't suitable but for a lot of problems it would be ideal."

