



Moving with the times:

Introducing digital workflows at Brandon Centre

In this case study, Julia Brown, Brandon Centre CEO, outlines how they've moved from paper-based processes to digital, with the help of their technology partner PatientSource, and transformed their mental health and sexual health services ahead of expanding its support across London and beyond.

Brandon Centre

The Centre is commissioned by the NHS, other healthcare providers, local authorities and grant funders. As part of this remit, Brandon Centre delivers a range of training programmes and special outreach projects, supporting over 6,000 young people and parents annually.

The challenge

As with many charities, Brandon Centre has had limited capital funds to spend on digital transformation projects and technology infrastructure. As such, when Julia Brown was appointed Chief Executive in June 2019, the organisation was still almost exclusively reliant on paper-based records and work processes.

Julia, who spent the formative years of her career as a nurse, midwife and health visitor, before taking on a number of senior management roles, including that of Chief Operating Officer at Enfield Primary Care Trust, is well-versed when it comes to challenging funding situations. However, she soon found that the situation for Brandon Centre was even more acute. "Unlike other charities and NHS social care services, Brandon Centre doesn't receive any additional funding for IT projects or infrastructure", she explains. "When I arrived, everything was on paper. I couldn't fault how the staff were caring for young people, but they were stuck in a traditional way of working. That needed to change."

However, the charity had already been through an appraisal process with some vendors, to assess the options to digitise by deploying an Electronic Patient Record (EPR). And most of the Board and senior staff had expressed their reservations given the associated costs. "They had looked at a range of

solutions from some very well-known suppliers", says Julia. "But the costs were extortionate."

Julia knew something had to be done to prevent services from being "held back" by outdated paper-processes. Furthermore, it meant the charity could upscale its level of collaboration with local providers — such as the Camden & Islington Young People's Sexual Health Network — to offer young people "the experience they deserve".

As a result, she made one of the first priorities in her three-year business strategy to overhaul the organisation's clinical infrastructure. She knew she just needed to find the right solution. And having conducted some further research including speaking with some different vendors, she went through another appraisal process to compare the options. There was a unanimous decision to implement PatientSource. "They had flexibility, plus it was cost-effective and had a clinical focus. It just seemed right for us."

"From the get-go, it has been a pleasure to work with PatientSource. They listen. They're supportive. They've crafted a solution that's right for us."

The solution

In November 2019, Brandon Centre signed a contract with PatientSource to digitise the delivery of its sexual health, mental health, healthy living and parenting services.

The introduction of PatientSource's EPR marked an expansion of the company's expertise into the sexual health and mental health sectors, further building on its clientbase with NHS acute hospitals and whole healthcare deployments for other clients across the globe.

The system's flexibility meant Julia was confident it was the right solution for their needs. "We didn't want something that was off-the-shelf", she explains. "PatientSource offered us something tailored and affordable."

Another key benefit was the intuitive interface that had been designed by a practising clinician (Dr Michael Brooks) — something that Julia said was evident from the solution's ease of use and flexibility: "You can tell that they understand the attitudes and cultures that exist within health and care organisations. Very often what you get is a box that arrives, which you then have to fit service delivery around. We didn't want that."

Implementation

PatientSource's EPR was rolled out across the Centre's sexual health services in February 2020, shortly followed by counselling and psychotherapy, and healthy living services less than a month later. The new system will be in use across all services by the end of May — much sooner than the charity had initially anticipated.

Julia explains how PatientSource worked alongside their clinicians every step of the way. "From before the implementation to now, they've taken the time to speak with us, design bespoke forms for the new system and make tweaks to ensure it worked for us", she says. "One of the biggest advantages for us was that PatientSource turned this around in just a few weeks, which was critical for us."

As part of the implementation process, Damian Quinn, Implementation Specialist at PatientSource, delivered training to each member of staff. Virtual support has also been available and staff from the Centre are encouraged to contact the company with queries.

"We're known for being 'clinician-designed', but what's equally important is being 'end-user refined'. It's why we respond to enhancement requests and feature changes from our customers — it helps users take ownership and improves the rate of adoption," explains Quinn. "It's our job to make sure that staff are completely comfortable with the technology, so they can continue to deliver crucial support to the Brandon Centre community."

Julia added: "When I think back to similar projects I've worked on, they've taken years to complete. We've done this in weeks — PatientSource has been brilliant. They've worked with us service-line by service-line, and been completely flexible. It's exactly what we needed."

The reaction

As is common with digital transformation projects of this scale, the initial reaction was mixed. Generally speaking, the staff that had worked in the NHS before, and were more familiar with digital processes, tended to be more receptive to the change, whereas for others, the new ways of working were more daunting.

"It's always 20% technology, 80% people", explains Julia. "Paper-processes were deeply ingrained within the workflows and a big part of my job was to change this mindset and encourage staff to move away from something they were inherently used to."

Julia found that the PatientSource training worked particularly well to alleviate many of these initial reservations. Robyn Beresford, Referrals Coordinator for the Counselling & Psychotherapy Service at Brandon Centre, who was involved in the project from an early stage added: "Fortunately, we had Damian [Quinn], who was so good at walking us through how to use the solution. He was with us every step of the way and made it so much easier for those who were struggling with the new technology."

As staff began to see the benefits of the deployment in terms of the standard of care, their enthusiasm increased even further. "It normally takes four or five years to shift mindsets across an entire organisation, but it's taken us weeks," explains Julia. "Once staff got over the fear of the technology and they could see the benefits, we didn't have any difficulties. We had some members of staff who were petrified of technology, but on the first day of implementation said: 'this is amazing!'"

"When I think back to similar projects I've worked on, they've taken years to complete. We've done this in weeks — PatientSource has been brilliant."

The benefits

Switching from paper-based processes to a fully digitised service promises a multitude of benefits, but Julia and her team consider the biggest advantage to be the time that staff are saving from improved workflows, for example by searching archived records and eliminating data duplication. "When we had paper files, staff spent a lot of time physically searching for paperwork, whereas now everything is in one place", says Robyn Beresford. "My job was taking three times as long, but PatientSource has made the whole process much more efficient."

Another workforce improvement has been managing statutory data submissions, including the Mental Health Services Data Set (MHSDS). Since implementing PatientSource — with the support of the company's Business Analytics Lead, Nick Jenvey — staff resource has been maximised by having all the clinical information captured in a structured format within the EPR.

What was previously a manual process has been automated, with error checking and data quality procedures built-in. Aimee Morgan, an Assistant Psychologist with responsibility for collecting data for the MHSDS, had little time to do clinical work and see patients before the software was introduced, "because two weeks of the month were spent manually processing data, but now it takes less than a minute each time."

"One of the best things about PatientSource is how it has helped us manage our submissions into the Strategic Data Collection Service", says Julia. "Not only does this significantly speed up the process of assembling the data, but it helps ensure clinical records are completed in full."

In addition to the time saved completing administrative tasks, staff say the new system allows them to work more dynamically, with communication between colleagues described as "more fluid, confidential and accurate". As Sam Weston, Lead Administrator at Brandon Centre explains: "The biggest positive is the amount of time that is no longer

"My job was taking three times as long, but PatientSource has made the whole process much more efficient."

spent on outdated paper systems and numerous separate databases, where data can be lost or duplicated. I can also update records in real time and check a medical history whilst on the phone with a patient".

The implementation of the new EPR service was also particularly timely, with the COVID-19 pandemic prompting Brandon Centre to move many of its services onto virtual platforms. "We were able to make the transition to remote working in less than 24 hours. The system has been nothing short of brilliant; I didn't realise you could move to a new IT system so seamlessly", explains Julia.

This sentiment has been echoed by other staff at Brandon Centre, including Matt Knox, a Clinical Psychologist, who said: "it would have been almost impossible to do our job without it."



Future plans

In less than six months, Brandon Centre has rolled out PatientSource across most of its services, and the charity now hopes to double the size of young people it supports by branching out across Greater London.

"PatientSource has unlocked so many opportunities for Brandon Centre", explains Julia. "Next steps include introducing performance reporting, which we wouldn't have been able to do without the new systems. And now that we've moved virtually, there's nothing stopping us extending our reach across London and beyond".

She adds: "From the get-go, it's been a pleasure to work with PatientSource. They listen. They're supportive. They've crafted a solution that's right for us."

