Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust delivers the right care at the right time to its patients with the help of BigHand Digital Dictation and mobility software.

Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest Mental Health and Disability Trusts in the England. It is one of the first Mental Health Trusts in the country to achieve a rating of ‘Outstanding’ from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and today is applying the learnings from its own ‘Transformation’ programme to help other Trusts across the UK achieve service excellence and sustainability.

NHS England has published its objective of transforming Mental Health services by 2020, putting Mental Health on an equal footing to Physical Health. Its Five Year Forward View for Mental Health highlights the importance of data in delivering the right care, at the right time, in the right place, a critical element in the transformation process.

As such, the journey that Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust (NTW) has undertaken, supported in part by BigHand, to remove manual processes and paperwork, and automate the collection and curation of clinical information, provides valuable insight into how technology, combined with a clarity of vision, can be an enabler of excellence.

Recognition of Need

Back in 2011, NTW embarked on a Trust-wide transformation project focused on releasing time to care, improving the quality of services delivered, and improving the productivity of its health care professionals. In undertaking a review of its service model, the Trust identified that clinical staff were spending a significant amount of time on administrative tasks and paperwork: travelling between patients in the community and a central team base in order to type up notes from their visits, and often doing so late in the day and painstakingly slowly.

Stewart Gee, Head of Transformation and Improvement:

“We wanted to start from the ground up in order to decrease the amount of non and low-value activity across the Trust. A key part of this was reducing the admin our clinicians were undertaking. For example, why would we have crisis psychiatric nurses typing up notes in the middle of the night when they’re needed to provide urgent patient care? The whole exercise was about recognising where we had pinch points in the care pathway and then looking at how we could address those.”
Following a small but highly successful proof of concept that NTW conducted in-house with off-the-shelf recording software, the case for a scalable enterprise level mobility solution was clear – pilot clinicians were able to reduce four hours of admin to one hour, and to dictate on the move in the community. Following a comprehensive procurement process, BigHand Digital Dictation and its partner M*Modal’s speech recognition software were selected for their best-in-class technology combined with BigHand’s flexible service delivery methodology.

The solution was initially rolled out across NTW’s community-based services in the South of the Trust, operated by a central transcription team, with clinical staff using smartphones to dictate and 3G enabled laptops with secure access to patient records to read and validate entries, all while on the move in the community.

“The central transcription team, who work 24x7x365, have a shift pattern that flexes with demand” explains Stewart. “Getting the notes into the patient record system quickly and accurately is vital in supporting clinical decision-making and improving patient services – hence the decision to have this team work the same hours as our clinicians who are providing 24x7 urgent care. The specialism of the team has enabled us to put in place standard processes that support our quality objectives.”

Designing the Workflow

The project team comprised members of NTW’s Transformation team, the Trust’s IT specialists, and BigHand consultants. Together they designed the whole Dictation Service from scratch, including developing a roll-out programme that adopted a bespoke ‘train the trainer’ approach.

Sarah Keetley, Transformation Lead:

“The introduction of BigHand has been an important enabler in our drive to improve patient safety and to increase efficiency through the reduction in turnaround times. Having admin and software support means clinical staff can focus on clinical tasks”

In line with its ongoing objectives of optimising internal processes and removing as much of the non-value activity as possible, NTW has also set out to make sure that its Transcription Team is as efficient as possible by adding Speech Recognition to the BigHand Digital Dictation and Mobility platform. The Trust continues to work on identifying new admin and clinical scenarios that the two software applications would best support, making technological advances and pushing the boundaries of both the Trust’s IT systems and those of BigHand and M*Modal.

Releasing Time to Care

Through its diligent and highly focused approach to optimising the effectiveness of its staff, supported by BigHand’s process transformation technology, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust is now recognised as an exemplar within the UK’s mental health industry.
The Trust has significantly reduced the amount of time its clinical staff spend on administrative tasks, with staff able to send voice files directly to the transcription team from their mobile devices. With the transcription team processing up to 10,000 dictations per month, communications to patients are much quicker than they were before the implementation of the BigHand Digital Dictation and Mobility solution, whilst patient records are also more complete and of a higher quality.

Sarah comments:

“Historically, medical dictations took up to 8 weeks to process. BigHand and our Transcription Team reduced this to same-day turnaround, and our Urgent Care staff currently benefit from a one-hour turnaround target. Patients know now that they will get both clear and timely communications, which in turn has improved safety and reduced out-of-hours risk, not least because our crisis teams have up to date records to work from.”

“The technology has also improved staff’s work/life balance,” Sarah continues. “We have been able to remove chunks of time where staff were using the last part of their shift to complete their paperwork - Nurses and Doctors can see patients much later into their shift, and are now able to work in flow much better, by dictating notes immediately following a patient visit, rather than ‘batching’ and saving them to the end of the day or week.”

Clinicians have told us:

“I can see more patients now”
“Takes a lot less time to validate notes than type them”
“I am less stressed, finishing work on time”
“Quality has improved – my spelling and grammar are much better!”

“Finally, the technology has improved the quality of the admission process because patients are now being admitted with a full set of notes from across community services and an up to date patient record. This is particularly significant as these patients are often the most vulnerable and at risk.”

Stewart concludes: “Fundamentally, BigHand Digital Dictation and M*Modal’s speech recognition continue to help us to remove as much of the paperwork as we can, allowing Nurses to get back to being Nurses, and Doctors back to being Doctors. The Trust would not have invested in the technology if we didn’t believe that we could get the cost benefit back by releasing time to care. Not only have BigHand and M*Modal helped us achieve that; the technology is enabling us to have access to the right data, at the right time, which has been instrumental in enabling our Trust Transformation vision.”

Key benefits for Northumberland, Tyne and Wear

• More time to care
• Improved accuracy, quality and timeliness of patient record keeping
• Increased mobility and flexible working across Trust

* https://www.en016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf