



# Digital clinical notes pathway is 'big win' for communication and patient safety at University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust

Case study



# In brief

University Hospitals Bristol & Weston NHS Trust operates over 10 different sites in the Bristol/Weston area of the UK, serving a core population of more than 500,000 people. The Trust has successfully introduced a new transactional digital pathway into 148 different clinical teams in just 9 months, using 3M™ M\*Modal Fluency Direct and Fluency Flex. Clinicians can now dictate, review and update patient records directly into their Electronic Health Record in real-time. This information is instantaneously available to other staff members at any desktop PC, improving communication across the Trust, and leading to a significant decrease in time taken for patients to receive letters about their care.



Employees: 13,000



Population: 500,000



Over 100 clinical  
services across 10 sites

# Technologies

3M Health Care is now Solventum

3M™ M\*Modal Fluency Direct

3M™ M\*Modal Fluency Flex

3M™ M\*Modal Fluency  
for Transcription

## The challenge

Like many hospital trusts in the UK, UHBW had relied for years on a combination of handwritten and dictated data for capturing notes and updating patient records. Whilst quick at the point of care, this process resulted in time delays for transcription and further delays for clinicians to correct, approve and sign letters. Physical case notes often went missing and clinical outcome forms were frequently misplaced, resulting in patients' treatment being delayed or even cancelled. In addition to the risk to patients, other concerns were raised around missing performance targets and standards set by the Patient Records Standards Body (PRSB), including the 7 day target for patients and GPs to receive letters about patient treatment.

UHBW had previously deployed a digital dictation software solution but this platform was in the process of being withdrawn from the Trust. This created a significant challenge in October 2022 for the UHBW digital services programme team – to identify a new replacement digital transcription solution and roll it out to nearly 150 clinical teams within 9 months. 3M (now Solventum) was recognised by the Trust as being 'best in class' in digital transcription solutions, and the 3M team were quickly brought on board to help the UHBW team with their ambitious goal.

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## The plan

The first 2 months were spent scoping all of the clinical teams and services to be engaged with system deployment – 148 in total across the Trust. The digital services programme team had to perform ‘rapid engagement’ with each service at 3 levels – engaging clinical, operational and administrative leads and coming up with options for each team.

As Sharon Tucker, digital services programme manager comments:

“It was a case of winning hearts and minds. You’re asking clinicians to stop a clinic process they’ve used for years, and this is met with some resistance, even though the incumbent solution was slow, relied on paper, and led to significant delays in communication”.

Fluency Flex offers real-time front-end speech recognition and digital dictation, using cloud-based technology so clinicians can document without connecting directly to the EPR. The team built templates in Fluency Flex to mirror clinical noting, tailoring the content for each recipient so the most relevant information would be contained at the top of the letter.

## The roll-out

Following the initial two months of planning, deployment started in earnest in January 2023. There were 2 project managers and a total team of 10 who deployed the roll-out to all 148 clinical teams across UHBW. Sharon comments on the intensity of the project: “We were like a little SWAT team, going into every single service! The project was not for the faint-hearted – at the height of the project we had 6 services going live on the same day. The 3M (now Solventum) team were brilliant, hand-holding us and supporting the rapid deployment throughout”. The team achieved full deployment by July 2023, just 6 months later.

Of course, anyone rolling out a new IT system anticipates initial challenges with deployment.

## The solution

3M™ M\*Modal Fluency Direct was selected as the best ‘direct to EPR noting’ solution for most services within UHBW. It provides an all-in-one, real-time speech and A.I. powered solution that enables clinicians to dictate, review, edit and sign clinical notes directly into the patients’ Electronic Health Records. Text appears immediately on the screen and clinicians are trained to use set commands to correct dictation. Over time, a voice profile is created for each clinician and many fields become populated with drop down options, minimising free text and assisting with data analysis.

3M™ M\*Modal Fluency Flex was selected as a replacement digital transcription solution for a smaller number of tertiary, offsite services which required more secretarial engagement.

Max Ward, clinical systems development manager comments:

“Moving from a classic dictation model to direct entry is a challenge and takes time to embed. We worked closely with all the clinical teams and will continue to partner with them through the current period of stabilisation. This has been a major change in how people work but the benefits are now becoming clear”.

## The impact

Indeed, the benefits of the new digital transactional pathway are both clear and numerous.

- Clinical notes are available instantaneously and simultaneously across the Trust.
- Communication has improved enormously with quick and easy access to clinical notes for doctors, pharmacy staff and nurses.
- Digital clinical notes provide a consistent structure for data capture and letters, meeting PRSB standards and providing a resource for data analysis.

But probably the most significant impact of the Fluency Direct and Fluency Flex deployment is in the clinical letters which are distributed to patients and GPs across the Bristol area. The letters are clear to understand and tailored to each stakeholder, with the relevant message at the top. Previously letters regarding patient appointments could take weeks to reach the patient, with many letters missing the 7-day target. Now 91% of letters are received within 7 days and this figure is set to improve further, with most patients and GPs receiving letters within 3 days.

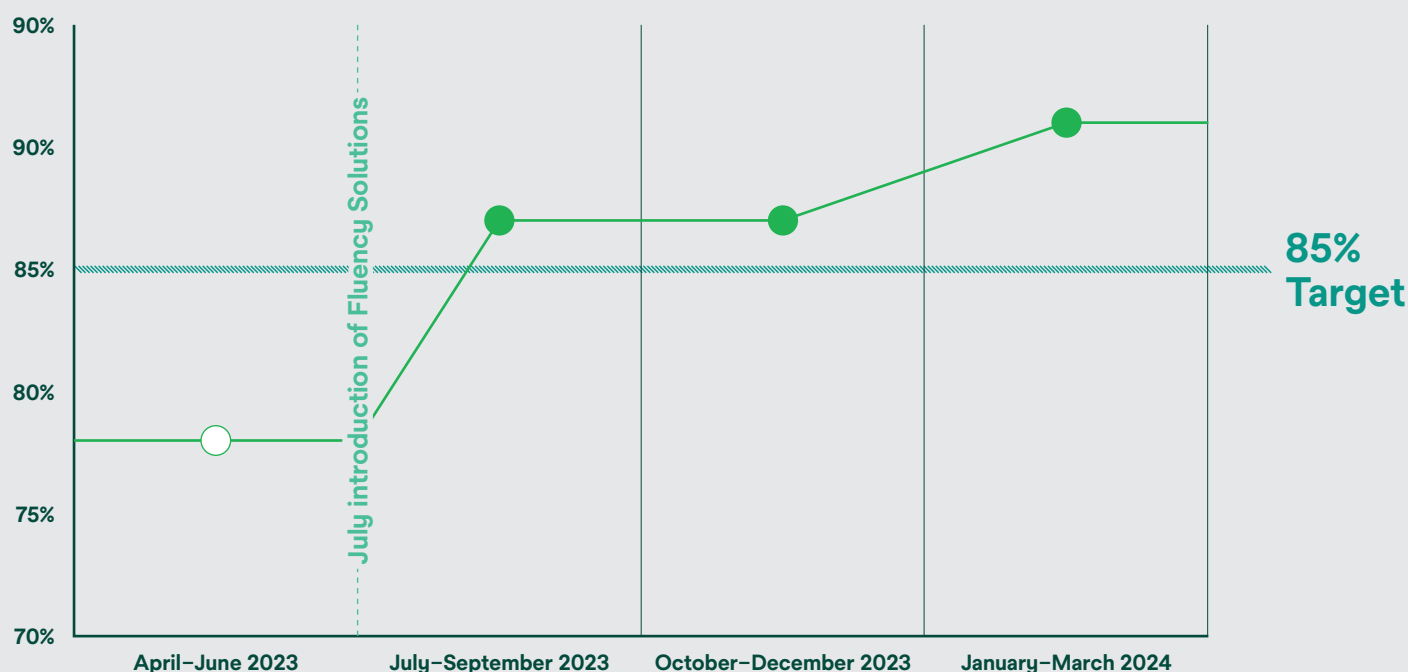
In fact the Trust has raised its own compliance targets to 90%, exceeding the national target of 85%. Sharon comments: “Now GPs are asking us to slow down a bit, our turnaround times are so good! Letters are sent in real-time, often the same day. Beforehand we rarely met our target, now we’re at 91%.”

## The future

The project continues to evolve with further stabilisation and optimisation. But the true benefits of system deployment are already tangible. As Max summarises, there’s an important ‘why’ behind the target to improve patient letters: “Letters contain clinical information that needs to be acted upon. If a patient walks out of a clinic and collapses, their clinical data is available immediately, across all services. We’re using data to improve quality and efficiency of future patient attendances throughout the hospital. This project provides a significant foundation for digitisation across UHBW Trust – enabling new insights, better data and more opportunities for improved patient care”.

The Digital Services Project team have also seen their heroic efforts recognised with a nomination in the category of ‘Digital Team of the Year’ at the 2024 HSJ awards.

## Trust clinical correspondence meeting 7 day target:



“The notes are immediately available to other clinical staff in the Trust, and the letters to colleagues across the city, which is a big win for communication and patient safety. If a patient needs to be seen by another member of clinical staff, even minutes after a clinic assessment, the notes of that consultation are available at any Trust PC.”

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Dr Adam Dangoor, consultant oncologist  
and joint chief clinical information officer,  
University Hospitals Bristol  
and Weston NHS Foundation Trust

## From

- Clinician hand-writes/dictates patient notes, these are transcribed by secretaries and sent back to clinician for sign-off.
- Notes can take days to update. Only one physical copy of notes can be viewed by one person at a time. Notes and records are often lost or mislaid.
- Little standardisation of patient records. Handwriting often indecipherable.
- 78% of patient appointment letters achieve the 7 day target, with some letters taking up to 21 days, leading to delay/cancellation of appointments.



## To

- Clinician types or dictates with voice-recognition directly into bespoke structured forms within the Electronic Patient Record.
- Notes updated in real-time and instantly accessible by multiple users across the Trust.
- Digital clinical notes provide structure for data capture and letters, meeting PRSB standards and providing resource for data analysis.
- 91% of patient appointment letters achieve the 7 day target, a figure set to further improve. Most patients and GPs receive communications within 3 days.



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