I have been a social care worker with the Orkney CMHT for 18 years working with all aspects of our service, specialising in substance misuse, for my sins I have also been involved as a digital champion in the new electronic systems being used today.
What have been the enablers?
• Patients willing to embrace such a drastic change in how services are delivered to them.
• Excellent commitment from the organisation, providing the equipment, software and support.
• Staff that are motivated and accepting of change, the organisation had previously recruited digital champions from the workplace so good peer support has been invaluable
• Perseverance by patients and practitioners.
• We are offering Near Me as a means of communication at every offer of appointment.
• Overall the system works well within the connectivity restraints locally.
• Additional near me links are available to patients on health board website

What’s worked well?
• Maintains contact with patients who are quite isolated at the best of times
• Reducing the risk of transmission of Covid 19 in outlying islands
• Enables good non verbal insight into patient’s health.
• Saves travel time and cost for patients and staff particularly in the isles.
• Increases capacity for work and reduces duplication of work
• Lessens time taken to reduce anxieties in patients,
• Near me has reduced the need to attend health care facilities to use VC equipment.
• Excellent links with outer island health practitioners
• Excellent links with specialist services in Grampian
• Psychology still able to offer treatments such as EMDR
• Psychology department are routinely offering near me at initial and subsequent appointments as part of their appointment process

What have been the challenges?
• Not all patients willing to use this platform for contact for various reasons, lack of access to suitable equipment, not being computer literate or are too mentally unwell.
• In recent weeks our broadband infrastructure in the islands has not been sufficient to cope with the sudden increase in public and staff usage at all times of day.
• Picture drop out is an issue due to poor connection speeds across Orkney.

Any top tips?
• Good support for staff and patients in the use of Near Me
• Encourage the use of near me at first and subsequent appointments.

We overcame our challenge by
• Being proactive, good positive reinforcement of Near Me
• Providing encouragement and appropriate support to users of Near Me prior to and during use.
• Being creative with IT solutions (such as using telephone alongside near me instead of using mic when internet link is poor)
• Inform and encourage existing patients of the benefits of near me
• Use the refresh button if link is poor.