

Peter Bates

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It's a tricky job, modernising services. All around the country, people in mental health services are grappling with the task of creating new services. Along with the introduction of assertive outreach teams, crisis resolution services and all the rest, *day opportunities* are beginning to replace *day centres*. There's rarely any new money, so starting a new activity usually means stopping an old one. It goes better if there is a clear vision of the new service, communication is honest and frequent, and there is widespread support for the change.

But nobody speaks about closing places. That's too dangerous. If we admit that some of the traditional services will close in order to transfer resources to new approaches, we risk alienating people who place great value on the existing service. It also feels like offering to fall on our own sword – overspent authorities and trusts will close the old, pocket the money and not get around to opening the new. Thirdly, anyone with experience of closing a service knows that it is so painful that it seems futile to think about how to do it well. Rather like the Victorian idea of having a 'good death', we simply prefer not to talk about it. So there are dozens of conferences, books and journal articles describing how to open new services, and a dead silence on how to close the old ones.

So, as editor, I invite you to write about your experiences of closing the old and opening the new. It would be helpful to take an organisational development approach and share some lessons learnt. What makes the difference between closing a service well and closing it badly? You might like to share how you have managed to:

- balance firm leadership with respectful listening to the most critical voices. How have you kept people informed about what is happening, even when the news is uncertain, complex or rapidly changing?
- focus on one person at a time. Have you been able to start by seeking alternative opportunities for new referrals or people who don't use the traditional service very much or those who don't like the service very much, or feel that they don't benefit very much? How have you gone about designing individual solutions, and have you avoided leaving all the hard work until last? How have you supported everyone before, during and after the change?
- Avoid leaving anyone behind. In poor closures, the new service is designed to address completely different needs, and so users of the traditional service are left high and dry. This is not modernising a service, it is cutting one.
- Do it quickly after deciding. Once the decision was made, did people hurry to leave, building maintenance cease or referrals dry up, leaving everyone demoralised? Did you sell equipment, re-let rooms and avoid mothballing things or hang on to everything just in case the change was abandoned?

There is much to learn from smooth, highly successful closures, and even more from rocky, painful struggles towards modernisation. What is your story?