Q. Why use ... Digital Stories?

A. Making digital stories can be an enjoyable, creative and empowering experience for the storyteller and the end product is an authentic and powerful means of touching hearts and minds that can used many times and in a variety of ways.

How to do it...

Digital stories are first-person narratives, told in the teller’s own words and voice and combining still images, music and sometimes short video clips into a video presentation typically between two and five minutes long. Traditionally digital storytelling has been conducted as a workshop process, whereby groups of people come together to share their experiences, develop them into short stories told through images and words, and then learn how to use the different software applications required to assemble the component parts. Digital stories can however be created by individuals working alone or with the support of a story facilitator depending on circumstances. Some people choose to develop the story script as a storyboard combining words and images. Some people prefer to tell their story spontaneously and illustrate after the event, while others still may require support to shape an experience into a short story format. However as the story is developed, the storyteller retains full editorial control over all aspects.

Careful attention should be paid not only to the development of the story but also to image choice, storyboard development and the conscious use of metaphor and artistic effects. This will help to enhance the communicational qualities of the end product and enrich the storytelling process.

In simple terms the story is audio recorded and combined with the teller’s choice of music and images using a simple software programme. The images may include personal photographs, artwork, or more abstract images that help to convey mood and feelings. Short video clips may also be included. The final story is then compiled into a common format video file that can be made available on disc or via websites.

Pros

- The storyteller has full ownership of the story, and this can be very empowering.
- The approach can also be adapted according to the individual life circumstances of the teller, taking factors such as physical and mental health status, the environment of care, competing demands on the teller’s time and the level of interest in the visual and more technical aspects of the process into account. This extends the opportunity of making a digital story to busy family carers, people with dementia, frail elderly service users, care home residents and adults with learning disabilities.
- The strengths of the end product are its brevity, authenticity and emotional impact. It can also be used many times and in a variety of ways.

Cons

- Digital stories can be quite time consuming to make, although when full ownership is given to the teller, the demands on staff time are greatly reduced. However, this is an important consideration. A three-minute story could include between 20 and 30 images, which can take time to source and prepare. Finding an appropriate music track, editing voice and video recordings all take time.
Access to technical equipment is also required – a microphone, a scanner if incorporating non-digital photos, a camera if extra photos are needed, headphones, and a computer installed with the required software.

While audio recording/editing, photo editing and video editing software can all be downloaded free of charge, some organisations’ IT policies prevent this.

Some government and NHS organisations also block the streaming of video files, so the end product might not be as accessible as you would hope.

Finally, the power and emotional impact of the digital story is unmistakable and this can result in some organisations seeking to use digital stories to promote specific agendas. In learning about the making of digital stories, an exploration of the underpinning principles, including issues of disclosure and consent regarding story use and retention, are more important than the acquisition of technical and practical skills, and this is best achieved in a workshop setting.

Resources
- Access to technical equipment – a microphone, scanner, camera, headphones and a computer installed with required software
- Audio recording/editing, photo editing and video editing software
- Venue and catering if being conducted as a workshop process
- Staff time, though this is greatly reduced if full ownership is given to the teller
- Story facilitator (if required)
- Reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses for lay participants.

Top Tips
- Pay careful attention to consent issues – a suite of consent materials is available through the Care Story Library.
- A story should have a beginning, middle and end, a clear point and emotional content. Don’t try to make a story out of a service endorsement or other form of commentary – ‘talking head’ video is a better medium for this.
- Making digital stories can be resource intensive. Before you begin, it is worth reading the guidance on ‘thinking about making a digital story’ on the Care Story Library.

Sources and further information
- A complete digital storytelling resource kit is available through the Care Story Library www.digitalstorylibrary.scot.nhs.uk Registration for this site is required, but as well as providing access to materials to support story making and use, a range of digital stories are available for viewing online or for download.
- Patient Voices: www.patientvoices.co.uk