

Case Study

Recruiting a new Chief Executive
for one of the most successful healthcare
providers in the UK



Background

Sir Andrew Morris was appointed general manager of Frimley Park Hospital in 1989 and became CEO two years later. He totalled twenty-nine years in charge and left with a formidable track-record.

For instance, Frimley Park Hospital was the first Trust in England to be rated as 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The turnaround that he led at Wexham Park Hospital from an 'Inadequate' to a 'Good' rating in fifteen months was described as the "most impressive seen" by Sir Mike Richards, the Chief Inspector for the CQC.

In 2017, a Health Service Journal panel comprising some of the most senior healthcare leaders in the UK ranked Sir Andrew top of the list of NHS chief executives.

Jim Mackey, former chief executive of NHS Improvement, described Sir Andrew as "a great example of what NHS leadership should be. He cares deeply about patient care, the service generally and the staff he leads, and he displays NHS values in everything that he does". At Frimley Health, the Chairman, Pradip Patel acknowledged that "Sir Andrew will be a hard act to follow". He went on to say, "I am determined to find the right person who can build on the legacy that he will leave behind." So that was the challenge.

The challenge

Although we had not worked with Frimley Health before, we immediately understood the scale of the task and the challenge ahead. Sir Andrew was clearly a much-loved and respected CEO who has given Frimley Health stability and taken it to great success. Inevitably, news of his forthcoming retirement as CEO increased the uncertainty for the organisation at a time of great pressure in the wider NHS operating environment. It was a crucial appointment for Frimley Health, and for Odgers Berndtson.

Understanding the culture and values

The Odgers Berndtson team worked in partnership with the Chairman, Pradip Patel, and Janet King, Deputy Chief Executive, taking considerable time to understand the culture of Frimley Health and the values that sit at the heart of the organisation.

Over the years, these values have been deeply embedded and underpin all facets of the organisation. This includes the Trust's strategy,

its commitment to workforce development, and its approach to recruitment and retention. It was clear that the new CEO would need to share these values and already have a track-record that demonstrated similar values in their day-to-day work and decision-making.

Defining success

As part of our preparation, we developed a balanced score-card to look at how we might evaluate success. This had four different dimensions to consider, including appointment and shortlist, through to the delivery of excellent candidate care, and our ability to look after and support Frimley Health. This was alongside the basics of meeting deadlines and providing quality documentation.

We agreed these success criteria with Frimley Health prior to the start of the assignment and they remained guiding indicators throughout.

Objective assessment

One of the key features of our approach was the importance of building a competency framework to be used at each stage of the recruitment process to assess candidates objectively.

We worked closely with the Trust to build this framework which reflected the person specification and the values of the Trust. The framework was then used to assess candidates at longlist, preliminary interview, shortlist, at presentation, during the stakeholder groups and in the final interview setting.

Using the same consistent criteria all the way through the assignment provided a clear analysis of the different strengths and development areas for each candidate.

Close partnership

As our team knows the market very well and can also draw on the Odgers Berndtson global network, we were able to target potential candidates nationally and internationally.

Given the context and challenge of this specific search, it was clear that the search would be completely bespoke. We would be working with a hand-picked group of potential candidates to develop their interest. Each potential candidate had their own specific, individual circumstances to consider, as well as different barriers to application and overriding motivations to work through.

We were delighted to shortlist three candidates for a final interview. This was possible only through the close partnership that was built between the Odgers Berndtson team and the Chairman. We used different interventions at different times to build and maintain candidate interest, and we were in touch constantly, with good, timely communication pivotal to the success of the search.

Cultural fit

At Odgers Berndtson, we believe that a candidate's past track-record is one of the best indicators of future success. Working with the Chairman of Frimley Health, we built a level of candidate due diligence that not only met the NHS's strict Fit and Proper Person Requirement, but also shone a light on each candidate's 'fit' with the culture and values of Frimley Health.

Our due diligence included the basics of psychometrics and candidate referencing, through to analysis of the candidate's media profiles, and performance outcomes in their current organisations over the last few years.

What's more, the Chairman of Frimley Health also visited each candidate's current organisation anonymously to gain a deeper perspective of individual candidate's challenges in their current role. All of this additional intelligence was fed into the final candidate assessment process.

Final hurdle

The final recruitment stages were rigorous and involved a large group of people over the course of two days.

Candidates delivered a presentation to a broad and diverse group of internal and external stakeholders. This was followed by progression through four different stakeholder groups, each of which commented on their ability to be the new Chief Executive of Frimley Health.

The two-day process culminated in a final panel interview, chaired by Pradip Patel, with members of the Frimley Health Board and an external assessor. While all candidates did very well in the process, one candidate, Neil Dardis, was deemed to be the better fit for Frimley Health across the range of competences and values assessed. After all the work and preparation, we had our appointment!



Case Study

Recruiting a new Chief Executive

Reflections

Naturally, the Frimley team and ourselves were all delighted with the outcome, and particularly pleased that the process we had jointly developed had delivered a successful outcome. Especially in the light of the stresses and strains of the NHS market.

We believe that success was delivered due to the effective partnership between the Trust and our team. We have taken forward and applied many of the best practices and processes learned from how we worked together.

In conclusion, we wish Frimley Health and Neil every success in the coming years and look forward to seeing it go from strength to strength under its new leadership, a worthy successor to an outstanding healthcare leader.

For more information



Carmel Gibbons
Head, Healthcare, London

Carmel Gibbons is a London based Partner and Head of the Healthcare practice. She is also a member of the Public Services and Not for Profit practice. Her work focuses mainly on senior appointments in the health and social care sectors. Carmel joined Odgers Berndtson in 2005. She was previously with Veredus Executive Resourcing, part of the Capita Group, where she was a Director and Head of the Health Practice. Prior to this, Carmel worked as a Consultant with PricewaterhouseCoopers Executive

Search and Selection, where she managed a portfolio of assignments across the public sector including health, social care, education, local government and central government. Before joining PwC, Carmel completed the NHS Management Training Scheme and held a range of NHS managerial posts within the community, acute, mental health and policy settings.

D: +44 (0) 20 7529 1128

E: carmel.gibbons@odgersberndtson.com