

Discussion Notes

19th March 2010

Topic 1: Governance arrangements that are persuasive on paper must be able to work in practice. What are your experiences?

Trusts are under increasing pressure to improve their governance arrangements in order to ensure that the Trust runs smoothly. With the ever-increasing burden, it is essential for Trusts to be confident that governance will work not only in theory, but in practice too.

The main issues around governance arrangements for many Trusts appears to be the increased demands placed on them, without there being suitable means of communications in place within the Trust to most efficiently meet the demands.

- With so many demands, some Trusts find it difficult to know where to invest their energy
- One Trust made the decision to put becoming a Foundation Trust on hold, opting to instead concentrate on getting the day job and their overall framework right first
- It was felt that to help in meeting all of the demands placed on them, that ownership needs to be taken at all levels, not just at board and committee, but at a front line level too
- There is a need to see where information is going as it can often be seen as simply going into a black hole – the information needs to go up and come back down

To improve Trust governance, it often appears that technology is the best solution – however not all software solutions work in practice.

- A number of Trusts found when using the PAS system that it was not overly user-friendly, and the newer version was actually even less user-friendly than the older one
- Some Trusts felt that it is a painful and expensive experience to implement new IT solutions, and that it seems sometimes that they never end up with anything tangible, instead find themselves constantly going round in circles to different people trying to get it up and running which is time consuming and costly
- It was felt that good governance starts at the top – one person found at their old Trust they did not used to use risk registers or spend much time gathering and collating data, they were not thinking about themes and trends. However, since then they have implemented risk management systems and incident reporting and have managed to embed it into the culture, this is working well and is appreciated at all levels, while improving governance

- It was generally believed that there ought to be a common interface or system to allow strong communication, and to open up communication with other local Trusts. This would be useful to have in place when patients need to be transferred to other local health services for the alternative services available

The consensus was that governance is an environment which needs to have suitable arrangements in place to ensure it runs at a high standard to meet the ever-changing guidance and demands placed on Trusts. It is crucial for everyone to be made aware of the changing and growing guidance. At board level they are all already aware of all the guidance, but it is difficult to get it down to the operational levels. Good governance arrangements would open up the flow of communication at operational levels, as well as at board level.

Topic 2: Can Trusts offer examples of best practice in storing, indexing, archiving and managing access to required information?

It is crucial for Trusts to manage information and documentation efficiently, therefore there needs to be a system in place to ensure that all information is centrally accessible and easily locatable.

- Boards must have access to the right information at the right times, so one Trust introduced a document management store to assist in this. They stored in it evidence of the Trust meeting regulatory requirements, but the document management system had been developed in-house so was quite basic
- An issue found with developing document stores in-house is that often the IT team will at some point no longer have the resources (i.e. individuals) available to further develop the system, resulting in the system not continuing to be developed and improve (such as having a sophisticated search function)
- Without the use of an adequate search function and other useful functionality, when policy reviews come up the administrators have to manually go through and search, documents, often from multiple systems, so that they can send out the relevant papers to the authors, which results in taking up a lot of their time unnecessarily

Most Trusts are aware that they need to spend money in order to save money, however in the current financial environment; this is not a realistic option for them.

- One Trust who did undertake the expense to improve their governance systems had SharePoint developed for them, which also allows them to utilise functionality such as automatic alerts, which will assist in radically reducing the administrator's workload
- Through using a central system such as SharePoint, everything, such as processes, is stored in the system. This means that someone else could come in and carry on developing the system if the original developer was to vacate the position
- Other Trusts felt that often within the NHS, not enough thought is given to what will happen when a member of staff leaves, and this can result in problems with not having correct passwords and being able to access specific documents

Topic 3: What approaches are being taken to ensure staff have access to the most up-to-date policies and procedures and how do you show that they are being actively and correctly followed?

Policies and procedures underpin a healthy Trust by ensuring that it runs smoothly and that all staff are knowledgeable and able to handle any issues they may encounter in the correct way. Staff must be aware of the existing policies and procedures and be able to access them to in order for them to be effective.

The key issue in assuring that policies and procedures are being actively and correctly followed is that of ownership being taken so that no area is neglected or overlooked.

- One Trust decided the best option was to break up all of the policies and procedures and delegate them down to the sub committees, who then report back quarterly to the integrated governance committee. However, a problem they encountered was getting the chairs of some committees to actually take ownership of the policies
- Ownership of policies is integral to them becoming embedded in the culture, within some Trusts, where there is a lack of ownership being taken, there is a feeling that they are just going in circles with the policies
- Another Trust suggested that the Board only read very few policies, as it is generally enough for them to know that they are working well and are being properly used. The Board only pick up and read thoroughly the policies that have a genuine impact on patients

There is also a need for policies to be stored in an accessible place, with the appropriate evidence that they are being followed.

- Some Trusts found that their intranets are not suitably organised which results in documents and evidence being stored all over the place and not easily locatable
- One Trust found that it could previously take them months sometimes to locate a specific policy, but now their intranet provides a more sufficient system to allow them to search and locate easily the policies to refer to when needed
- The general belief was that the procedures need to be easily accessible in order to allow them to be changed when necessary, along with an audit trail to show why any changes have been made
- It is also essential when drawing together policies for the staff to be aware of the relevant standards and regulations, but the operational staff are not always aware of these. A

centrally accessible system allows for all information and documents relating to policies to be stored together in one place where all staff are able to access it

It was concluded that policies are not simply about box ticking for CQC, but rather that they are about supporting staff. When the policies are working well, they will naturally tick all of the boxes themselves.

Topic 4: What has been the impact of The Intelligent Board report?

The Intelligent Board report aimed to improve Board effectiveness and to further enhance Trust performance. However, with the recent release of The Francis Report and The Healthy NHS Board report, there is a feeling that perhaps The Intelligent Board report has become slightly outdated.

There was a consensus that that The Healthy NHS Board report is much better than The Intelligent Board

Every Board in the country at the moment will most likely have an agenda topic to review the Mid Staffordshire report and its implications, to ensure they have the assurances in place that they will not be going down the same route

- Some Trusts felt that the problem at Mid Staffordshire was that no ownership was being taken, and these are lessons that need to be learnt
- There was also a lack of information that got to the Board at Mid Staffordshire, with too much trust being placed on external advisors giving them assurances that were not being questioned or challenged
- One Trust found themselves reassessing their assurances by addressing all the recommendations made in the Mid Staffordshire report
- It was agreed that ownership must be taken as there is the need to self perpetuate, meaning that a light is not just shone on one area at a time whilst something else is being missed
- Also, assurances need to be checked regularly – it was felt that the biggest risks come from becoming confident and therefore becoming complacent in certain areas

One issue also found was that of objectivity, particularly amongst the executives.

- It was felt amongst some Trusts that the whistle blowing policy often only allows someone to go through the chief executive. Due to this, issues can often be missed or ignored; there needs to be greater assurance of a good and open communication flow
- One Trust suggested that the chaplaincy service may be a good source for an objective view, as they are relatively independent and they objectively witness what is happening at the hospital

It was suggested that The Intelligent Board requires re-examining the role of NEDs, in order to remain relevant.

- The Intelligent Board believes that the role of the NEDs is to help set strategy and to hold the executives to account, not to be operational
- However, it was pointed out that more recently David Nicholson has said that NEDs should get operational as this is where Mid Staffordshire went wrong. The NEDs need to be fully knowledgeable to allow them to fully challenge
- It was also found within some Trusts that the executives do not always take advantage of the expertise NEDs have to offer. Most NEDs have been executives on a board in large

companies previously elsewhere, and thus may often have transferable skills that could be of use to their current board

- The public rely on the NEDs to have a different view from the executives and to look out for the public's interest. This is easier for them to do as they do not have the feeling of professional manners and of not wanting to challenge a colleague, which many executives often encounter