

FTGA National Development Day, Understanding Crises 14 March 2013, in London

Introduction - Panel Discussion - FTGA Directors in crisis-hit trusts

The Panel discussion was chaired by Richard Lindley (Lead Governor, Royal Free London NHS FT) and panel members were: Mike Fowkes (Lead Governor, Mid Staffs NHS FT); Raymond Sheehy (lead governor Oxleas NHS FT); and Angela Woodcock (Governor, James Paget NHS FT). Judith Craven, Mark Gillett and Claire Hankey attended the session. The panelists brought 3 different perspectives on crisis:

- Mike Fowkes related his experience of being a governor following the crisis at Mid-Staffs, a situation with which we are fully familiar following the publication of the two Francis Reports;
- Angela Woodcock related the experience of being a governor when Monitor declared it in breach for Governance and Healthcare and other standards following the Trust's failure to effectively address concerns raised by CQC. A key concern was that the Trust's Board had not been taking a proactive approach in identifying and addressing problems quickly enough and considered this evidence of weakness in its governance processes;
- Raymond Sheehy brought a very different perspective of his Trust being threatened by the failure of the South London Healthcare NHS Trust and the 'request' for them to take over Queen Mary's Hospital in Sidcup.

Themes/Issues Raised

The discussion was wide ranging and covered a range of themes and issues

- Complacency - governors being reassured by Chief Exec and Chair that there were no problems with which they needed to be concerned so CQC and Monitor findings came as a surprise.
- Structure and notion of 'expert' governors - governors specialising in specific areas - 5 governors on each of 5 sub-committees e.g. Finance and Performance, Care Quality and Innovation, each attended by relevant Director - no non-execs. Emphasis on safety and care.
- Profile, visibility, role (and power) of governors - non-minuted private meetings of governors, selecting their own chair, summoning non-execs. Acting as challenger. Visits to clinical areas on planned or unplanned basis, but recorded systematically. Passing resolutions that were minuted for Board to consider at the next meeting, with formal report back - appropriate reports from NEDs and Directors including action plans and deadlines.
- Capacity for problems across a border to impact on a successful trust.

Matters for consideration

- Relationship between Governors, Non-Executives and Executive reliant on trust - how do we build and sustain this?
- Do current structures enable governors to fulfill their role effectively?
- Do governors feel they have sufficient expertise and information to challenge effectively and hold non-execs and directors to account?

Reading

1. CQC and FTGA (March 2013) Working together (Key pages 4 & 5)
2. FTGA (Jan.2013) Headline Brief Open Board Meetings
3. FTGA (Jan 2013) O1 Role of the Governor in foundation trusts