

25th July 2011

Why leadership is key to success of 1000 Lives Programme

The NHS in Wales is an enormous organisation employing thousands of staff and providing a vast range of services in many healthcare settings including hospitals, ambulances, GP surgeries, community centres and patients' homes.

So when it comes to improvement initiatives, or even making simple changes to the way we do things to improve the quality and safety of care, how can we make sure the benefits are felt for all our patients?

The Welsh NHS Confederation, which represents all local health boards and trusts in Wales, believes that much of the reason the 1000 Lives Plus programme is so successful is because of the emphasis it places on leadership to make improvement happen everywhere.

1000 Lives Plus aims to improve quality of care and reduce avoidable harm, waste and variation across NHS Wales and strong leadership is crucial to its success.

Ultimately, accountability for all aspects of healthcare delivery rests with the board; the group of directors responsible for the way the organisation is run and managed.

Given the size and scale of health boards and trusts, it is critical that a clear chain of accountability connects the board with front line teams in all parts of the organisation.

That's why all organisations have an accountable executive director on their board with responsibility for 1000 Lives Plus and the work of the programme is one of the first items on the agenda.

This is just one way health boards are demonstrating to everyone that quality and safety improvement is core business.

Leadership at board level builds the will throughout the organisation to make systemic improvements for the benefit of all patients.

It enables great ideas about new ways of doing things to spread to different parts of the organisation as quickly as possible.

Continued focus from the board on improvement initiatives also improves the chances that the effects of change will be sustained and ensures that old habits do not resurface.

Strong and effective leadership is key to how an organisational culture develops and changes. This is especially so in the NHS, where the culture among staff must be one of unwavering commitment to providing safe, high quality care with an emphasis on continuous improvement.

Of course for this leadership to be successful, it needs to be visible.

One important and successful way this has happened through 1000 Lives is the introduction of executive WalkRounds which are now seen as routine practice at board level.

They are an effective way of demonstrating visible leadership for quality and safety improvement at a practical level, involving both executives and independent board members.

They give senior staff the opportunity to speak at length to frontline staff and patients about quality and safety issues. They can discuss what is going well, what is going badly and what needs to be improved.

It allows board level managers to record all concerns in a systematic way and ensures that issues needing attention will be taken forward.

The success of 1000 Lives Plus programme does not mean that NHS leaders are complacent. Far from it.

Leaders in all parts of our health service are maintaining the focus on quality and safety improvement at the highest levels of our NHS.

The challenge is to keep on identifying and testing new ways to improve the safety culture within our healthcare system even further.

As David Sissling, the chief executive of NHS Wales said at a recent 1000 Lives Plus event: "1000 Lives Plus is about more than aspiration. It's about taking an ambitious stance and aiming for excellence."

Patients across Wales can be assured that the NHS is doing just that. In putting their full support behind the 1000 Lives Plus programme, NHS leaders are showing that quality and safety of care is their number one priority.