Measurement of improvement The program participant proved their ability to lead changes in the hospital through their projects

Strategy for improvement All participants informed that they have improved their systemic approach, their effective communication, their ability to motivate their teams, and their decision making in complex situations

SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP IN CLINICAL NETWORKS: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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The program participant proved their ability to lead changes in the hospital through their projects. They have improved their systemic approach, effective communication, ability to motivate teams, and decision making in complex situations.

Context This work was undertaken in the UK as part of a Masters degree in healthcare management and leadership. The study was designed and completed by the 1st author, with support of the lead author. The target audience includes clinicians, non-clinicians and policy-makers involved in the organisation, leadership and delivery of collaborative health care, with a specific focus on clinical networks.

Issue/Challenge Clinical networks are strongly promoted as clinically led, patient-centred and relationship-oriented collaborations offering the flexibility to improve the delivery of healthcare. The stated aim is to improve clinical care for specified populations without the constraints of professional or organisational boundaries. This method of organising requires a different approach to leadership than has been predominant in traditional hierarchical health care organisations. Systems leadership, a distributed form of leadership that crosses organisational, professional and geopolitical boundaries, is promoted as a must have in modern health care. Its principles sit comfortably with the concept of clinical networks but the concept has not been specifically investigated in this setting and a more concrete model of clinical network leadership is yet to emerge. The aim of this study was to investigate the application of systems leadership principles in acute clinical networks and build a new model of leadership for this healthcare setting.

Assessment of issue and analysis of its causes

Using an iterative approach, a model of clinical network leadership has been developed by taking established concepts on systems leadership and integrating with observations and evidence from the literature on leadership practices in clinical networks. Key themes, ideas, concepts and their inter-relations were categorised and mapped out before being consolidated into a model. This model was repeatedly tested and refined through referring back to the literature (inductive processes) and the existing theories (deductive processes).

Impact Clinical networks are increasingly important in providing more integrated health and social care in an ever more complex world, and are reliant on the collective leadership of, amongst others, clinicians who may find themselves in positions of leadership through their clinical expertise and not necessarily their leadership expertise.

This model of network leadership can provide clinicians and other network members with one way to think about the way in which network leadership operates. It brings together the structural, behavioural, relational and operational considerations that may be unfamiliar or obscure to them. It can guide interactions and leadership activity and highlights how individuals can contribute. This model can inform practice within clinical networks and improve the effectiveness of leadership activity. Its principles could also be transferrable, helping to better navigate the complexities of leading and interacting within larger complex systems, such as Integrated Care Systems or understanding how healthcare systems are evolving with the deconstruction of traditional hierarchies of the past.

Intervention The model contributes to our understanding of leadership by deconstructing the many human, organisational and political demands of network leadership and highlighting their relationships and interdependencies. The model could be used by individuals or organisations as well as a focus for further research. The methodology used to develop this model is novel and could also be applied in other settings.

Involvement of stakeholders, such as patients, carers or family members:

This was a theoretical study and stakeholders were not involved.

Key Messages Systems leadership concepts suggest that leadership in clinical networks should be collective and distributed, with interactions based upon high trust relationships and commitment to the long term. The network’s agenda should be driven by the shared values of its stakeholders and its objectives achieved through influencing as opposed to command and control. Much of this is supported in the literature, although other considerations emerged including the need for a combined top-down/bottom-up approach within leadership structures that are both distributed and designated. We propose a model of network leadership with four domains:

- Locality & organisation;
- Styles, behaviours and relationships;
- Roles and tasks;
- Tensions and vulnerabilities.

The practice of systems leadership is necessary but in itself is not sufficient as an approach to leadership of clinical networks. This review consolidates the evidence and provides concepts that could help clinicians and managers navigate the challenges of leading these networks.

Lessons learnt As the work progressed it became apparent that involving stakeholders in developing and refining the model would add value. The practice of systems leadership is necessary but in itself is not sufficient as an approach to leadership of clinical networks. This review consolidates the evidence and provides concepts that could help clinicians and managers navigate the challenges of leading these networks.

Strategy for improvement Future work to test the model is in development.

NORTH WEST LEADERSHIP SCHOOL (GREATER MANCHESTER)

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Measurement of improvement As a theoretical study, measures of improvement have not been considered but future qualitative research would include this.

Strategy for improvement Future work to test the model is in development.