



# **Is bigger better? Lessons for large-scale general practice**

## **1. Leadership and governance**

# About this booklet

From 2014-16, the Nuffield Trust undertook research that combined a literature review, national surveys and qualitative and quantitative analysis of case study sites.

All lessons are captured in four booklets. This booklet covers the leadership and governance of large-scale general practice organisations.

Booklets 2, 3 and 4 cover sustainability, working with the wider health economy, and improving quality.

## Five first steps to help practices form successful large-scale general practice organisations

### **1** Develop the simplest possible governance arrangements

- Take time to define what you are trying to achieve and be explicit about organisational values
- Then develop the simplest possible governance arrangements that will let you achieve goals, set strategies and manage risk<sup>1</sup>
- Be prepared for your governance arrangements to change over time
- Ensure that the governance group can put in place the skills and resources needed to achieve agreed goals.

## **2 Create a leadership team**

- Decide whether to drive change through top-down ‘directive’ management or a more collaborative and ‘concertive’ model of change
- Distribute leadership roles widely throughout the organisation to build engagement and avoid burnout<sup>2</sup> – however, a very large leadership team can create diseconomies of scale and make coordinating decisions difficult<sup>3</sup>
- Lead by example and gain staff trust by participating in the delivery of high-quality care and being visible among frontline staff to address problems.

## **3 Create lines of accountability to members**

- Establish clear systems of accountability of the board to member practices
- Be clear about how much power members have to shape strategy and to veto plans that are not consistent with the organisation’s values
- Be clear about how people can join the board and take on leadership roles
- GPs having a sense of ownership and some practice level autonomy will help ease organisational change<sup>4</sup>
- Ensure that staff feel valued and understand what role they play in the organisation – even if not in leadership roles – the consequences of not doing so can include recruitment difficulty.<sup>5</sup>

## **4** **Involve your members in key decisions**

- Consult with members about vision, values and priority areas of change
- Agree with member practices what control over day-to-day work they will cede to the larger group. This will have a significant effect on the rate at which you can drive change
- Communicate regularly and simply about progress and strategy.

## **5** **Create lines of accountability to patients**

- Be clear about the rationale of the practice to join the large-scale organisation – be explicit about the challenges
- Find ways to gather patient views on how to organise shared services and build their understanding of what the organisation is trying to achieve at an early stage
- Be sure that promised changes happen quickly or you can risk patient disengagement<sup>6</sup>
- Provide assurance to patients, where possible, that aspects of the service they value will not be lost through the practice joining a large-scale organisation
- Build links between patient participation groups and local civic organisations, as they may help to engage patients with the larger organisation and support goals relating to wellness and health promotion.

# References

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