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
   - 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.
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\(^2\) – however, a very large leadership team can create diseconomies of scale and make coordinating decisions difficult\(^3\)
- 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.

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\(^4\)
- 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.\(^5\)
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
- 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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