

Responsible Officer and Appraisal Networks Information Sheet 17

Nominating the medical director as responsible officer

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The responsible officer regulations describe duties to assist healthcare organisations in providing safe, high quality care for patients by assuring high professional standards among doctors¹. A designated body should therefore nominate their medical director as their responsible officer where the medical director role or equivalent exists.

Doing so ensures that:

- the responsible officer duties are directly represented at the top of the organisation, given that the medical director sits on the governing body and shares corporate responsibility for the vision, values and strategic objectives of the organisation.
- the person with statutory responsibility (responsible officer) is also the person with operational responsibility for those duties (medical director). This is both intuitive and practical given the overlap between the duties of the responsible officer and the medical director roles.

Nominating the medical director as the responsible officer also avoids the risk of conflict whereby the person with statutory responsibility is subordinate to the person with executive power. This potential conflict may inhibit the effectiveness of the responsible officer function generally. Also, it usually necessitates the appointment of an alternative responsible officer for the medical director, because it is a conflict of interest to be organisationally superior to your responsible officer².

In a large organisation the scale of the organisation and the breadth of the medical director's portfolio may be such that it is not possible for one person to do all the work of both roles. In this situation the medical director may delegate operational management of the responsible officer function to others but should normally retain the statutory responsibility and title of Responsible Officer.

Where a designated body is considering nominating a person other than the medical director to be their responsible officer, they should first consider:

- how the responsible officer functions will be resourced and embedded into the vision, values and strategic objectives of the organisation;
- how to manage disagreements between the medical director and responsible officer;
- if a conflict of interest will be created, necessitating the appointment of an alternative responsible officer for the medical director.

They are also encouraged to discuss the matter with their higher level responsible officer before deciding.

1 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/medical-revalidation/ro/>

2 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/medical-revalidation/ro/con-of-int/>

This information sheet is relevant to all designated bodies in England.

These information sheets are written on an ad hoc basis, on issues of relevance to responsible officers and their teams, medical appraisers and doctors.

High quality care for all, now and for future generations.