

Online library of Quality,
Service Improvement
and Redesign tools

Clinical engagement



Clinical engagement

What is it?

Senior clinical leaders have a major influence over patient care, from making the diagnosis to determining the care pathway. They have a wealth of knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of NHS systems and need to be an integral part of achieving successful and lasting change.

Clinicians have a professional responsibility to their patients and employing organisation and to their professional bodies, for example the General Medical Council, the Royal College of Nurses, the General Dental Council and the Health Care Professions Council.

When to use it

Engaging senior clinical leaders from the start of improvement work is helpful and important. They can help shape a project plan to ensure that it is practical, sensible and doable. They are in a good position to advise on what may or may not work in practice.

If changes are proposed that seem to contradict a professional body's stance, conflict may result.

How to use it

Think about who to engage – do you want to work with someone who you know is likely to be in favour of the change, or work with a colleague who may have a different perspective? Although this may sound counter-intuitive, someone who 'resists' an idea can help identify the risks, pitfalls and unintended consequences and help you work out how to mitigate these.

Opinion formers are sometimes resistant to change and can easily convince others to stay within their comfort zone. If this is the case and you are attempting to persuade a group of senior clinical leaders to make a change, the process is likely to fail.

To increase your chances of success, you should:

- have a well-prepared project plan with clear objectives to benefit patient care
- focus on quality improvement rather than delivering targets
- be well informed with accurate facts and figures
- get to know your clinicians
- listen to clinicians and respond to their concerns – they have knowledge and experience, insight into patient services and the power to help your project succeed or fail
- engage individually with clinicians rather than just in a group. This will enable detailed discussions of the ideas proposed
- meet at a convenient time to minimise loss of clinical activity
- share examples of how the proposed change works elsewhere. This may include use of patient stories
- communicate regularly about progress and see the project through.

Other considerations include: clinicians who have worked in the organisation for a long time may have a good reputation and be well respected while newer clinical leaders may bring examples of good practice from other organisations along with fresh eyes and new ideas.

Make sure that you maintain senior clinical leader involvement at all stages of your improvement project.

What next?

The following tools will help when considering clinical engagement:

- [stakeholder analysis](#)
- [bullet proofing](#)
- [enabling collaboration by working with resistance](#)
- [active listening](#)

Additional resources

Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (2010) *Enhancing Engagement in Medical Leadership Project*

Kornacki, MJ and Silversin, J (2012) *Leading Physicians through Change: How to Achieve and Sustain Results*, Second Edition, ACPE Publications

Reinertsen, JL, Gosfield, AG, Rupp, W and Whittington, JW (2007) *Engaging Physicians in a Shared Quality Agenda*, IHI Innovation Series white paper, Institute for Healthcare Improvement: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Welsh Medicines Resource Centre, NHS Wales and National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (2008) *Engaging Clinicians in a Quality Agenda*

Woodward, F (2007) *How to Achieve Effective Clinical Engagement and Leadership when Working Across Organisational Boundaries – Practical Recommendations*, Modernisation Initiative