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# Governor development : the journey from appointed governor to non-executive director

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# GOVERNOR DEVELOPMENT: THE JOURNEY FROM APPOINTED GOVERNOR TO NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dr Jacqueline Leigh shares her journey from moving from an appointed governor role at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust to working as is a non-executive director at Healthwatch Salford.

I am a nurse and I work as a Reader in Teaching and Learning healthcare leadership and management and practice learning at the University of Salford. Over three years ago I agreed with the head of school at the School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences that I would be the appointed governor at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust. This was an exciting opportunity for me as my university leadership role involves educating student nurses who undertake their practice learning at the trust. Being an appointed governor therefore meant that I could directly influence the clinical practice experienced by students. For example recognising a gap in student nurses' quality improvement (QI) skills I led on the development and implementation of the Salford Undergraduate Quality Improvement (SalQual) Programme in conjunction with trust and university staff.

Students were asked to participate in a range of activities that enhanced their knowledge and skills of quality improvement and leadership and these included watching short video, participating in real world' work based QI and leadership learning opportunities and reflecting on their experiences. Participating in the programme students enhanced their understanding and application of QI methodology; applied QI tools and techniques for the benefit of patient care; and worked as a team to enhance quality and to measure the difference that they had made. Importantly, student nurses contributed to the trusts Better Care, Lower Cost Programme through identifying areas for improvement. The student's ideas were shared with the Trust executive team with the students invited to attend future quality improvement initiatives. Therefore, in my appointed governor role I was able to influence the content and structure of the programme thus helping to expose student nurses to more techniques on quality and service improvement which proved to be invaluable in equipping them to become high quality future nurses.

When first appointed I remember feeling excited but also a little scared, particularly about what questions to ask during the council of governor meetings. As I settled into my role I learnt the skills of holding the board to account through asking often challenging but insightful questions and I learnt how to make sense and scrutinise the information in front of me. Important for me was that I always asked at least one pertinent question at each council of governors meeting.

As governor I became actively involved in the trusts many groups and sub-committees that governors can get involved in and I chose to be part of the engagement group. Within this group we developed and implemented ways to gather staff, patients, visitors and members views on inefficiency and waste they have experienced or observed and how this could be improved. I spent time talking to patients in the trust, seeking their views on how the trust could provide the best care but at a lower cost. Being part of this group made me realise how passionate I was about developing the means for ensuring that people in Salford have a say in the planning and delivery of health and social services.

In May /June 2016 I saw the role of non-executive Director Healthwatch Salford advertised and I knew right away that this was a role that I would like to apply for. I wanted to become a Board member of Healthwatch Salford because I am a compassionate person and passionate about empowering the people of Salford to make decisions about healthcare services. Healthwatch Salford aims to encourage and enable local people, including those who are most marginalised or vulnerable to have more control in their lives and to influence the organisations that affect them.

The fact that at the time of applying for the role, Healthwatch Salford saw itself as a small and fledgling organisation with unlimited potential meant that there was great scope for me to become part of a team that would champion and influence health and social care policy, planning and commissioning for the benefit of its local people.

During my interview for the non- executive director role it became clear to me how Healthwatch Salford was prepared to think and work differently and that my ideas and experiences that I would bring from being a nurse, Reader and as an appointed governor at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust would be warmly received.

I was pleased to have been appointed to the non-executive director role but at the same time sad to have to leave the role as appointed governor. The nature of the director role meant that there would be a conflict of interest with my governor role therefore I decided to resign from my governor post.

My experiences of being an appointed governor at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust provided me with the skills to become a non-executive director at Healthwatch Salford. These transferable skills included being able to work as part of an effective team and developing strategies to give the people of Salford a voice. I am not afraid of challenging others and I always do this in a constructive way, acknowledging that everybody has a right to their own opinion. Other transferable skills included the management in meeting agreed goals and to monitor the reporting of performance through scrutinising the trusts dashboard of results. As a non- executive director I am expected to exercise independent judgment and I developed these skills as a governor through forming my viewpoint based on the evidence base and if the evidence was not available asking the challenging questions.

My advice to new governors just starting out is to find out what support is available. I was assigned a buddy who was a staff governor and this proved invaluable. Observe the process at the first few governor meetings and do not be afraid to ask questions, no matter how silly they may feel. What was great about being an appointed governor at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust was how I felt valued in my role, and this inspired me to get involved in as many groups and activities as possible. There are lots of networking and training opportunities made available for governors and my advice is to attend as many training events as possible. Finally, enjoy the role, engage with the process and be prepared to make a difference.