



Embracing external scrutiny to build bridges and genuine partnerships between education and clinical practice



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ABSTRACT

Despite having made significant changes and improvements since 2007, publication of The Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (2013) refocused attention on the poor care standards that had taken place. Recommendations include far reaching national transformational changes not only for the National Health Service but also for professional regulatory bodies and other agencies linked to health and social care. This paper describes how external scrutiny was embraced to move staff from initial loss of confidence, feelings of anger and defensiveness to embracing opportunities to increase transparency, build bridges and genuine partnerships between universities and healthcare providers. Following an Extraordinary Review by the Nursing and Midwifery Council an action plan was collaboratively formulated between Staffordshire University and Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust. This resulted in the implementation of a Practice Learning Improvement Project which monitored the action plan, ensured sharing of all learning and production of evidence for external scrutiny. Key lessons learnt included the need to: move beyond mere compliance with regulatory performance indicators; engage senior staff in all aspects of student learning; develop candid sharing of soft and hard intelligence, clearly delineate placement support roles and ensure engagement of academics in practice has transparent outcomes for the student, practice and education.

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Background

The Independent Inquiry into care provided by Mid Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust (2010) known as the 'Francis Report' identified systemic failures highlighting a culture of bullying and in some instances an acceptance of inadequate standards of people-centred care. The Inquiry revealed disturbing and harrowing patient stories which were reaffirmed in the Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust Public The Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (2013). National Health Service Foundation Trusts are described as not for profit organisations that are devolved centrally from the Government to local organisations and communities.

"They provide and develop healthcare according to National Health Service principles – free care, based on need and not ability to pay" (Monitor, 2014; pg. 1). Regrettably Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust failed in its duty and responsibility to provide safe, quality care in services to the community and staff. The suffering and neglect of vulnerable patients was substantiated in both the Public (2013) and Independent (2010) Inquiries.

This paper is essential in sharing and disseminating the learning beyond the local and national context extending to global healthcare providers. The aim is to highlight the importance of embracing external scrutiny and regulation to enhance patient safety, quality and governance systems and processes. We offer practical advice and guidance through examples from the lived experience in rebuilding bridges and open, transparent relationships with partner organisations.

Following the publication of the Francis Report (2010) a public inquiry was instigated to review and learn from the events in order to prevent this from reoccurring. Although the focus was on Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust it was acknowledged that nationally there were other organisations in

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similar situations. A concern echoed previously by [Parliament Health Committee – \(Seventh Report, 2011; pg. 6\)](#) “the ongoing public inquiry into the Mid Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust is uncovering poor standards at one Foundation Trust; unfortunately it is unlikely that the experience of this trust is unique”. The Committee were concerned with low standards of basic nursing care in acute hospitals and care homes. This comment has proven to be true with the publication of the [Keogh Report National Health Service \(2013\)](#) where a number of hospitals were identified for investigation of higher than average hospital mortality rates. Internationally the importance of developing sincere and genuine partnerships which focus on improving patient safety ([McNamara, 2011](#)) and care standards ([Maas Burhans and Raile Alligood, 2010](#)) is gaining momentum across United States of America, Canada and Europe. Central to this is the establishment of patient safety cultures between education and clinical practice which incorporate candid dialogue to promote caring, compassionate and people centred environments ([Debourgh, 2012](#)).

The major findings from the Francis Report (2010) and [Public The Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust Public Inquiry \(2013\)](#) highlighted a lack of nursing leadership and management, ineffective channels of communication, inadequate standards of care and compassion, a closed culture and working environment. These are all factors posing challenges for genuine partnership working globally between education and practice ([Murray, 2008; Ridley, 2008](#)).

Engaging health and social care professionals about the value of external scrutiny in care settings can contribute to quality and best practice ([Johnson, 2005](#)). Similarly, [Mowles et al. \(2010\)](#) and [Snelling \(2010\)](#) highlight the importance of embracing external scrutiny to inform and improve patient safety, quality and outcomes for patients along with the working environment and organizational cultures. External review informs and directs improvements in work practices that impact on patient care and where necessary rebuild public and staff confidence in the organization by demonstrating that improving quality and safety is a shared objective ([Johnson, 2005](#)).

Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust is one of the providers of clinical placements for Staffordshire University and in 2010 the Nursing and Midwifery Council instigated an Extraordinary Review of Pre-registration nursing provision between Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust and Staffordshire University. The purpose of the Nursing and Midwifery Council is to quality assure all Nursing and Midwifery Council approved and re-approved nursing and midwifery programmes through a process of annual monitoring and independent peer review. ‘Extraordinary Review’ may also be instigated at any time over and above usual monitoring events where concerns with education, professional practice and/or standards are identified ([Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2014](#)).

When the Extraordinary Review was undertaken the Nursing and Midwifery Council had no documented process for such a review to follow at that time. Interestingly the [Parliament Health Committee – Seventh Report 2011](#) highlighted that the Nursing and Midwifery Council were underdeveloped particularly around fitness to practice, education and training at that time. The Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE) Review on the Nursing and Midwifery Council (2012, pg. 4) supports this highlighting “weaknesses in governance, leadership, decision making and operational management” It also maintained their main problem continues to be performance in fitness to practice and there has been underinvestment compared to other regulators. Weaknesses identified in the Francis report (2010) were reflected in those being uncovered in the regulators.

The increasing scrutiny of Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust over a number of years from the numerous regulatory organizations failed to piece together the whole picture regarding inadequate quality standards, patient safety and staff development. A pitfall of United Kingdom and international regulators and organizations acknowledged in 2004 by [Walshe and Shortell](#). Significantly the Mid Staffordshire Hospital in the quest for foundation trust status concentrated on financial targets over quality and the lived experience of patients and staff (Mid Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust [Public The Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust Public Inquiry, 2013](#)).

The culture of “secrecy, professional protectionism, defensiveness and deference to authority is central to major failures” ([Walshe and Shortell, 2004; pg.103](#)) in organizations. Learning from serious incidents and events should be proactive where the internalizing of information is harnessed to improve, transform and share with others ([McSherry and Pearce, 2011](#)). This can help to avoid any recurrence for that or any other organization. The challenge for individuals, teams and organizations is in embracing external scrutiny as an agent for informing and leading change. Learning and sharing are crucial in assuring and guaranteeing quality nursing and patient safety. These must be a priority for all healthcare organizations and those registered nurses and midwives who are respectively employed by them.

The challenge facing Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust or any health and social care organization that are deemed to have failed the public and professionals is in how and where do you start to rebuild trust, confidence and gain support from either the public or other external related stakeholders to move things forward. The use of knowledge mobilization to aid performance improvement, as suggested by [Walshe et al. \(2010\)](#), was the approach chosen that could provide a positive way forward for both the Trust and University partnership. Recognising the need to embrace external scrutiny is important in helping to resolve the issues of staff and the public regarding their disengagement and despondency surrounding the access and delivery of services ([Rapson et al., 2012](#)). Rather than seeing doom and gloom staff needed to see a different picture in order to visualize a new future and use lessons learnt to go forward in a positive way. In order to ensure the above occurred, strategic planning and visioning through action planning was essential.

Focussing attention on visioning and strategic planning as suggested by [Millett \(2006\)](#) and [Bryson \(2001\)](#) enabled Mid-Staffordshire National Health Service Foundation Trust and Staffordshire University to unify education and practice through targeting people and resources. This included the establishment of a Practice Learning Improvement Project designed to implement, monitor and evaluate a strategic action plan. The Practice Learning Improvement Project team comprised senior representatives of the various partner organizations from education and practice including a newly appointed Deputy Director of Nursing/Professor of Nursing and Practice Development and a Project Coordinator. This role was fulfilled by a Senior Lecturer from Staffordshire University working full time with the Trust. The strategic action plan developed by the Practice Learning Improvement Project team advanced and enhanced practice.

The specific detail of actions taken aimed to improve the student learning experience, support mentors and enhance quality assurance mechanisms are described in the following sections. Improvements were designed to assist in developing leadership, strengthening communication, raising standards of care and compassion and promoting openness and transparency, all of which were subsequently recommended in the Public [The Mid-](#)

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