Leadership and management in psychiatry

A position statement from the Royal College of Psychiatrists

The Royal College of Psychiatrists believes that psychiatrists fulfil important leadership roles both in their clinical teams and in the organisations in which they work. The College believes that patient care benefits enormously from the clinical leadership of psychiatrists and that the best mental health care organisations value the contribution made by psychiatrists in service planning and strategy.

Leadership in mental health can be considered at three distinct levels; the strategic, the service and the frontline. Psychiatrists are uniquely well placed to innovate and align efforts within and between each of these levels reflecting their experience, knowledge and roles. All psychiatrists have a responsibility both to provide care and improve care.

Psychiatrists can be leaders at many levels ranging from frontline clinicians who deliver excellent services, through a spectrum of clinical innovators, academics and researchers, to those who provide professional leadership through professional bodies or at various levels in their employing organisation. Psychiatrists can be leaders at every stage of their careers, from the trainee to retirement, and may assume formal leadership and management roles such as clinical or medical director or commissioning lead.

The importance and values of medical leadership are articulated in Good Medical Practice (General Medical Council, 2006) and its supplement Leadership and Management for all Doctors (General Medical Council, 2012). The responsibility for delivering leadership is shared by psychiatrists, employing organisations, educators, professional associations and government. All psychiatrists are expected to achieve and demonstrate an agreed set of leadership and management competencies at each stage of their training and career as clearly described in the Medical Leadership Competency...
Framework (NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement and Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, 2010).
Psychiatrists have a unique understanding of and expertise in mental healthcare needs, challenges and provision. They can set standards, inspire and promote values and vision and use their training, clinical experience and skills to ensure that the needs of patients are the central focus of their organisation’s aims and delivery. They understand how patients experience mental healthcare and how the processes and systems for delivering this can be improved. Major changes in the provision of mental healthcare are often driven by psychiatrists functioning as key decision-makers in resource utilisation. Psychiatrists should complement and respect the vital roles played by clinicians from other professional backgrounds; delivery of mental healthcare is a team activity in which all members make important contributions to improving mental health and service provision. The ability to unite this diversity of talent and perspectives to meet organisational aims is a hallmark of a successful medical leader.

Leadership and management are distinct but complementary activities, both are pivotal to the provision of high quality mental healthcare. Modern leadership emphasises the importance of relationships and may be defined as “a process whereby an individual (the leader) influences others to achieve a common goal” (adapted from Northouse, 2003). The whole team has responsibility for identifying problems, solving them, contributing to transformation and where appropriate providing constructive challenge. Management may be defined as “getting things done well through and with people, creating an environment in which people can perform as individuals and yet collaborate towards achieving group goals and removing obstacles to such performance” (adapted from Koontz, 1962). The Kings Fund (2011) Report sets out a distributed model of leadership with an emphasis on collaboration, integration and supporting leadership throughout the organisation. This model sits well for leadership and management within mental health care organisations.

Mental healthcare organisations, their structures, systems and processes are essential features of the clinical practice of psychiatry. Managerial tasks are therefore fundamental to the delivery of high quality mental healthcare. The majority of these tasks will be undertaken by professional managers but psychiatrists can contribute significantly to their effectiveness. High performing mental healthcare organisations are typified by strong partnerships between psychiatrists and managers at all levels. Psychiatrists should recognise their responsibilities to wider systems of care
and not just to individual patients, and work collaboratively with managers, united by a shared desire to learn from experience, improve services and enhance patient safety.

Training in management and leadership should be part of the continuing professional development of all psychiatrists. Leadership and management development for psychiatrists should focus on organisations and systems as well as individuals and be informed by the organisational context in which individuals work. It should include a range of developmental experiences which are meaningfully integrated and planned longitudinally rather than as single programs or events. Development should be linked with work assignments, human resource planning and business strategies and contribute to the personal development of the psychiatrist and improved functioning of the organisation.

References

General Medical Council (2006) Good Medical Practice. London: General Medical Council

General Medical Council (2012) Leadership and management for all doctors. London: General Medical Council


NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement and Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (2010) Medical Leadership Competency Framework. NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement. Third Edition


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