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I was inspired to join the NHS Clinical Senates when I learned about their work during a training session with the national clinical leaders network.

I'm an interim medical director at the moment and my involvement with the NHS Clinical Senates gives me some really useful insight into what's involved in changing strategies and healthcare. As consultants, we have to deal with lots of strategic decisions, not only with our immediate services but also where we fit in and work in the wider local health economy.

I've been involved in a variety of clinical reviews with the NHS Clinical Senates including South Tyneside hospitals, Manchester hospitals and the Cheshire specialist mental health services review. Sometimes my involvement will be through a desktop review at the Senate meetings, other times it will include hospital site visits or a mixture of the two.

The NHS Clinical Senates are like a 'critical friend', critiquing Trusts' service change proposals, providing challenge and recommendations through independent clinical reviews. Their service is totally free of charge. They are a vital resource for both community and secondary care Trusts in supporting critical decision-making around major service reconfiguration. We definitely need to make more Trusts aware of their existence.

With the NHS Clinical Senates, Trusts have at their disposal a group of multi-skilled and highly experienced NHS professionals and lay people, all passionate about the NHS and ensuring the best possible healthcare can be delivered. These range from NHS Consultants, a whole host of allied health care professionals (AHPs) to the general public and decision-makers in STP. To me, it makes great sense if we can harness their passion and use the expertise we have at our disposal rather than buying in expensive service review expertise from private consultancies.

Being involved with the NHS Clinical Senates is an extra challenge on top of the day job. It broadens your horizons and gives you some maturity on how you approach problems. I've learned how to effectively communicate decisions to both decision-makers and non-medical managers using the right language – including decisions that might negatively impact people. This learning can be really helpful in all sorts of scenarios and is a valuable skill that can help in an interview situation too.

Being involved with the NHS Clinical Senates is really good for networking too. I now know a lot more people and decision-makers in other organisations. I can appreciate the challenges they face and the solutions they bring to bear.

The NHS Clinical Senates also invite us along to events where we can learn from others. For instance, at a recent meeting we heard from a CEO from a different Trust that had been through a period of change and he highlighted how that had been managed. We got to hear about the processes for the Liverpool hospital redesign, how you would conduct a change in service including public relations exercises and public consultations. You don't just make decisions to support a clinical review – you also learn how other people have gone about things and you can then bring that to bear if you're asked to do a particular review.

In terms of time commitment, there are monthly meetings but the NHS Clinical Senates' team are very flexible and understand if something important within your Trust has to take priority. My employers have been very good too, giving me the time to attend meetings and be involved. Being able to do these reviews on NHS time but at no expense to the NHS other than the clinical workload

that's involved is hugely important. I'd really encourage other people to join the NHS Clinical Senates.

At the moment, the NHS Clinical Senates are very well represented from the Consultant body from numerous disciplines. So, I'd really like to encourage more AHPs and lay people to get involved. For AHPs, their skills base is necessarily expanding and they're taking on more roles than they did previously – that's helping them become leaders in their own right. Being involved with the NHS Clinical Senates is incredibly useful, instructive and informative for anyone who has a leadership role in the NHS. For lay people who have a very vested interest in service design and ensuring the best available healthcare can be delivered, they **absolutely** need to have a voice.