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I've been in nursing for ever! I started out in the late 80s / early 90s. My background is predominantly in renal and I've worked as an advanced nurse practitioner for 16 years. I'm also Vice-President for the British Renal Society. After achieving my PhD, I reached a point where I wanted a role using both my clinical and academic experience. An opportunity came up at my Trust to be a consultant nurse for older people and frailty. So, now my job is 50:50 academic/clinical. I've always been very patient focused and I've been lucky that I've been able to be both very patient focused in my role, but also progress in my career.

I'd really recommend nurses like me – and allied health care professionals such as physios and occupational therapists - to get involved with the Clinical Senates. We need more 'on-the-ground' voices and there's so much value we can bring, representing patients and what's important to them.

I joined the Clinical Senate five years ago. I applied, after a renal consultant I was working with encouraged me, saying: "I think you'd be really good at this." I was invited along to a Senates assessment day. Before the day itself, I had to read and review strategic level papers about a diabetes service reconfiguration. Then, as part of teams of 8-10, we took part in a timed task to feed back and come up with recommendations. I was successful and appointed to the Senate Council.

On the Senate Council, you play a very strategic role reviewing proposals for major service reconfigurations. In the early days I used to feel there were a lot of presentations and service providers were all saying a similar thing – that they wanted a healthier population and to reduce health inequalities and better access to a, b and c. – but I used to sit there thinking, "I want to know the nitty gritty. I can't quite understand how you're going to deliver on this" but I would never speak up because I didn't feel confident, or my views weren't relevant, compared to some of the more senior experts in the room. My day job didn't involve lots of strategic level work and I did struggle initially wondering if I was 'qualified' to critique some of the service reconfigurations I was reviewing. However, as I got more involved, I became more confident to ask what I'd first thought would be seen as 'daft' questions. In fact, I've since learned that the people who ask the questions that are really key are often the patients' voice; they can be so astute at just asking a question nobody else has thought about.

In my role, I've taken part in several reviews where a team of us visited hospitals under reconfiguration. In those situations, walking around departments in clinical settings, I felt more confident to ask questions. I particularly enjoyed a site visit as part of the Sunderland hospitals review. We had lots of opportunities to speak in smaller groups and to meet with the executive teams on both sides. It's really healthy to do a site visit because you can really start to look beneath the surface. You also get a sense of the geography and what it would be like for a patient if they suddenly had to travel another 20 miles. At the Senates, we are very patient focused and there's always a big emphasis on transport and how this affects the patient.

Being involved with the Senates has given me more confidence – and also the experiences – that consulting with your workforce is critical for any major change. If you're part of something where there's a major change going on, you can stand up and say, "What's the consultation here?". As a nurse, you bring a different perspective. It has made me think differently. I'm happy to go in any level meeting now and it doesn't faze me. I feel I can make a valuable contribution; I can add value somewhere – whereas in my first two or three Senate meetings, the feeling of 'imposter syndrome' stopped me speaking out quite so much.

Now I know that the higher somebody goes up in an organisation, the more they need the input from the day-to-day people. It's really important to do that and that's partly what the Senate does – we sit in a room and ask the executives those critical questions. I feel confident to go in that room in front of the executives with my nursing hat on and say, “I didn't see much consultation with your nursing workforce.”

Often people automatically think we're here to inspect – like the CQC – but that's not the Senate's role. We're not here to say, “You can't go ahead with this.” What we can do is word it in a way that strongly recommends. We can influence decisions. It's like an extra insurance process.

Being involved gives you the skill set to critically review. There is so much pressure financially for transformation and reconfiguration of services that you do need an external quality assurance process to ensure that everything has been thought about for the right reasons.

I think when we did site visits, the clinicians felt safe so we were able to have quite open discussions with them. As an external audience from a variety of different backgrounds we were able to ask those sometimes difficult, yet critical, questions that are essential for whatever it is they are trying to do – questions about patient safety, staff and workforce representation. They have to be able to demonstrate they've taken that on board and what they've done about it. They can't ignore it. What we do is a very informal process to help teams who are managing the transformation process. On site visits, I've found the clinicians in particular have been quite honest – and we also try to speak to patients too, to bond with them and get that crucial patient feedback.

Being involved with the Senates is not a huge time commitment – around six half-days a year- and it widens your horizons. You take away things that can add value in your own organisation. You bring back new expertise and an understanding of what's going on in other places that is quite simply invaluable. You're always given plenty of notice ahead of a review – for example, it will be a two-day visit in six months' time, so you're able to plan ahead and you'll always know the dates by which all papers have to be prepared by.

Apply today. You won't be disappointed – and you will gain so much!