

Circus Skills for Quality Managers in Healthcare

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Objective

To provide a memorable training programme to equip quality managers to lead organisational change through the implementation of quality initiatives.

Methods

Every quality improvement initiative in healthcare needs a manager. This role is often delegated to a manager, or nurse, who already has a wide range of duties, and who then has to manage an initiative with little training or support and no reduction of existing responsibilities. Quality managers rarely have line management responsibility of the staff who are crucial to the success of the quality initiative. There is often an underlying feeling that it is distracting staff from the 'real' work of patient care. All of this adds to the pressures when tasked with change management to bring about quality improvement.

Quality managers often describe themselves as having to 'juggle' many responsibilities. HQS decided to take this further in the development of a training programme that would equip quality managers with the skills and tools they need, all presented as 'circus skills' in order to make the training memorable and keep a light hearted approach to what can otherwise seem a daunting task.

The quality manager has to employ the skills of:

- A ringmaster – *keeping all the project elements moving along – keeping the show on the road*
- A lion tamer – *working with staff who are hostile to the quality initiative and winning them round*
- A clown – *Keeping the participants engaged with the quality project also sometimes having to be the fall guy if senior people have not done their bit*
- A trapeze artist – *trusting that the next pair of hands will be there to catch the project and keep it safely moving*
- A juggler – *keeping all the strands of the project going at once*

HQS investigated the needs of individuals given the task of taking quality initiatives from launch to successful conclusion. The vast majority of quality facilitators or quality co-ordinators had no previous experience of project management in any form. It was clear that initial training needed to focus on the basics of a project management approach. Feedback showed that often too much general information had been given at an early stage. Each stage of implementation of the quality project needs a fact sheet or checklist to be used as a guide for both staff and the quality manager. We developed an approach that distilled the key learning points in fact sheets that are adaptable and flexible enough to be useful in situations where there are many constraints that would make a traditional project management approach impractical.

Results

Quality managers are more confident and able to work with challenging issues as they come up. Quality managers feel informed about their role, able to communicate with other staff on the required tasks and to lead through a facilitative style. They remember the training elements and it assists them in adopting the most helpful approach, thinking through whether they need to be the lion tamer or the clown, the juggler or the ring master to successfully complete each stage of the quality project.

Conclusions

The training programme has been enormously popular and is adaptable to any quality project, particularly if it has to be managed on scant resources in tandem with existing responsibilities and needs leadership at grass-roots level to implement change management.