



Dr Ann  
Burtonwood  
is a Business  
Partner in  
the  
Porthcawl  
Group  
Practice  
Wales

[ann.burtonwood@gp-w95041.wales.nhs.uk](mailto:ann.burtonwood@gp-w95041.wales.nhs.uk)

## Ann Burtonwood

Are NHS managers up to the job? The answer, as ever, depends on what you mean by managers and where you are looking.

Primary care organisations have always operated on the basis of lean management with the emphasis on management rather than manager - the function being shared across a number of roles in Practices.

Those of us who manage in primary care have had plenty of experience in managing through both times of lean and of plenty, with one critical difference from our secondary and PCT/Health Board colleagues - that the effect of our actions is actually realised in what each of us and our partners/employers earn at the end of the working day.

The crux of the issue about top-heavy management is not about primary care though, is it? Even though over 90% of healthcare is delivered in that setting, it is about secondary care and the structures set up to monitor targets and respond to the insatiable demand for information to feed the political machine.

The success of Government performance, rightly or wrongly, is driven by public perception of achievement against targets (hence the demand for information and need for managers) which in turn is shaped by anxiety stimulated by the political process and the media.

*I have been in my current role for so long now, that I have seen virtually every fad/initiative and change over the past 30-odd years brought in, scrapped and come around again (and sometimes twice).*

Remember the "Patients Not Paper" initiative of the late 80's and early 90s? I have seen those reforms, which worked extremely well saving vast amounts of bureaucracy, scrapped. We, in primary care now seem to be back in the dark ages again as the bottom of the food-chain of bureaucracy - where once, for example, there was a perfectly functioning electronic system for enhanced service claims as items of service, in Wales at least, each claim must now be made manually.

I don't have access to the data, but I'm very sure you could tell me how many people are employed in Health Boards/PCTs, all reinventing wheels and trying to 'monitor' primary care and reporting on targets to higher levels. Sadly, the current health system is driven by fear.

Politicians fear failure to delivery constant reform will be reflected at the ballot box; patients fear that the service will fail them; clinicians fear they are being driven along pathways which inhibit their abilities to care for their patients as individuals, or to effectively act as the patient's advocate; managers - ever the soft target.

The whole process is a degenerative spiral which is driven by the perceived remedy; 'yet more change and more targets'. In reality, effective change management requires a culture in which the freedom to experiment thrives; with the risk of failure, to actively learn from experience if it does fail and to adapt and move on.

This freedom, where it ever existed, no longer exists in healthcare. The system we have all sought to manage, paradoxically, now manages us!

The simple truth is that the essence of healthcare is people. Patients as individuals with individual needs and clinicians and managers as individuals, also. Not whipping-posts to be professionally degraded.

That individuality cannot be regimented into a standardised system and target-driven culture requiring ever more management and monitoring in a climate of fear and recrimination. We desperately need a return to a state of trust at all levels in the system, in which trust and confidence in healthcare professionals is not undermined at every turn as a political expedient.

Sorry for the rant - hope it makes some sort of sense.

It is lunchtime and I am allowed my five-minute break off the hamster-wheel!

Keep up the good work!

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