

Leadership Conference

I had the privilege of attending the Leaders in Healthcare Conference in Liverpool at the beginning of November. This was a huge event involving hundreds of experts and I had a really interesting few days. The NHS is going through a turbulent time, and yet many of the obstacles faced are similar to the challenges within the Irish healthcare system.

The real learning was found in the small group events. We heard from Majors in the British Army, who, using organisational techniques honed in battlefield situations, have assisted hospitals in the UK when dealing with crisis management. Planning is key – so went the mantra. We heard from our colleagues across the border in Northern Ireland – their experience with taking time out of clinical practice to engage in Leadership efforts.

One of the dangers of Healthcare Leadership and Improvement is that you can become removed from frontline workers. I realised this as I observed attendees at the conference. Whilst the message conveyed by headline speakers was that everyone was doing a great job (and most of the front rows of senior NHS leaders agreed), once you filtered into the small groups of nursing, medical and allied healthcare professionals you detected a palpable sense of frustration at the lack of senior support.

We learn from our own, and others', mistakes. It is vital that we encourage everyone on every level of the healthcare system in Ireland to engage in Healthcare Improvement – after all, if there was an easier way to get to work you'd jump at the chance. Why not find an easier, or safer, way to carry out our work?

Even the smallest change can be significant. Write down the problem, write down the ideal situation and then work on joining the dots. As I've seen in Liverpool, there is huge collective appetite for improvement – the way is just poorly lit.