

# NHS top managers, knowledge exchange and leadership: the early development of Academic Health Science Networks – a mixed-methods study

Ewan Ferlie,<sup>1\*</sup> Davide Nicolini,<sup>2</sup> Jean Ledger,<sup>3</sup>  
Daniela D'Andreta,<sup>4</sup> Dmitrijs Kravcenko<sup>5</sup>  
and John de Pury<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Management and Business, King's College London, London, UK

<sup>2</sup>Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

<sup>3</sup>Department of Applied Health Research, University College London, London, UK

<sup>4</sup>Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

<sup>5</sup>School of Business and Management, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

<sup>6</sup>Universities UK, London, UK

\*Corresponding author [ewan.ferlie@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:ewan.ferlie@kcl.ac.uk)

**Declared competing interests of authors:** none

**Disclaimer:** This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published May 2017

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr05170

## Plain English summary

### The early development of Academic Health Science Networks

Health Services and Delivery Research 2017; Vol. 5: No. 17

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr05170

NIHR Journals Library [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)

## Plain English summary

Academic Health Science Networks (AHSNs) were set up in the English NHS to stimulate and spread innovations both to improve the health of the population and to contribute to a newer goal of wealth creation. AHSNs have a regional focus to operate as an innovation network, trying to bring different partners and sectors together to spread new ideas and knowledge at pace and scale.

This study responded to a call for research on how innovations and new knowledge could be spread more effectively in the NHS. It explored the emerging strategies and practices of the AHSNs as they tried to do this. We also looked at the leadership roles played by some key people.

We employed various research methods: a literature review; an analysis of national policy; an analysis of the shape and structure of networks as they developed, undertaken via two national surveys; case studies of five AHSNs and also of 10 specific innovations; and finally some in-depth interviews with people who had emerged as important 'knowledge leaders' (KLs).

Our core findings suggest that there were different networks emerging around the health and wealth goals of AHSNs; perhaps not surprisingly, the newer wealth networks were still at an early stage of development. These networks took different forms in different AHSNs. We developed a general model of the strategic approaches AHSNs took towards spreading new ideas and knowledge. Finally, we uncovered some of the characteristics and skills of 'KLs'.

We hope that the study will be helpful to the AHSNs and the wider NHS in reviewing and developing future work on innovation. Finally, we make some recommendations for future research, including a longer-term assessment of AHSN impact.

# Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) ([www.publicationethics.org/](http://www.publicationethics.org/)).

Editorial contact: [journals.library@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:journals.library@nihr.ac.uk)

The full HS&DR archive is freely available to view online at [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr). Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)

## Criteria for inclusion in the *Health Services and Delivery Research* journal

Reports are published in *Health Services and Delivery Research* (HS&DR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HS&DR programme or programmes which preceded the HS&DR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

## HS&DR programme

The Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was established to fund a broad range of research. It combines the strengths and contributions of two previous NIHR research programmes: the Health Services Research (HSR) programme and the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme, which were merged in January 2012.

The HS&DR programme aims to produce rigorous and relevant evidence on the quality, access and organisation of health services including costs and outcomes, as well as research on implementation. The programme will enhance the strategic focus on research that matters to the NHS and is keen to support ambitious evaluative research to improve health services.

For more information about the HS&DR programme please visit the website: <http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hsdr>

## This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 12/5002/19. The contractual start date was in September 2013. The final report began editorial review in April 2016 and was accepted for publication in January 2017. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health.

**© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2017. This work was produced by Ferlie et al. under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.**

Published by the NIHR Journals Library ([www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland ([www.prepress-projects.co.uk](http://www.prepress-projects.co.uk)).

## **Health Services and Delivery Research Editor-in-Chief**

**Professor Jo Rycroft-Malone** Professor of Health Services and Implementation Research, Bangor University, UK

## **NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief**

**Professor Tom Walley** Director, NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies and Director of the EME Programme, UK

## **NIHR Journals Library Editors**

**Professor Ken Stein** Chair of HTA Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

**Professor Andree Le May** Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (EME, HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals)

**Dr Martin Ashton-Key** Consultant in Public Health Medicine/Consultant Advisor, NETSCC, UK

**Professor Matthias Beck** Chair in Public Sector Management and Subject Leader (Management Group), Queen's University Management School, Queen's University Belfast, UK

**Dr Tessa Crilly** Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

**Dr Eugenia Cronin** Senior Scientific Advisor, Wessex Institute, UK

**Ms Tara Lamont** Scientific Advisor, NETSCC, UK

**Dr Catriona McDaid** Senior Research Fellow, York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, UK

**Professor William McGuire** Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

**Professor Geoffrey Meads** Professor of Health Sciences Research, Health and Wellbeing Research Group, University of Winchester, UK

**Professor John Norrie** Chair in Medical Statistics, University of Edinburgh, UK

**Professor John Powell** Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK

**Professor James Raftery** Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

**Dr Rob Riemsma** Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

**Professor Helen Roberts** Professor of Child Health Research, UCL Institute of Child Health, UK

**Professor Jonathan Ross** Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, University Hospital Birmingham, UK

**Professor Helen Snooks** Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

**Professor Jim Thornton** Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK

**Professor Martin Underwood** Director, Warwick Clinical Trials Unit, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Please visit the website for a list of members of the NIHR Journals Library Board:  
[www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors)

**Editorial contact:** [journals.library@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:journals.library@nihr.ac.uk)