

A Wake-Up Call for Healthcare Boards

Numerous high-profile events in several provinces related to quality of care have illustrated that governing bodies are ultimately accountable for the safety and quality of care in our organizations. These events have served as wake-up calls to many boards, which are seeking guidance to better understand and live up to their responsibilities. This issue of *Healthcare Quarterly* addresses the need to clarify and support the board's role for quality and safety. Many boards have traditionally relied upon management or medical staff to look after quality and focused on financial resources and relationships with key stakeholders. Today there is increasing awareness that healthcare boards cannot abdicate their responsibilities for ensuring quality and safety and need to take specific actions to address these duties.

This need is recognized by the Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI), which is sponsoring development of a tool kit to assist boards in carrying out their roles related to quality and safety. I am honoured to co-lead this work with Jim Nininger, former president of the Conference Board of Canada. The governance tool kit involves a rich set of resources and related training, and it will be available by spring 2010.

In this issue, Ross Baker and his colleagues summarize their research regarding effective governance for quality and safety in the Canadian healthcare system. They confirm that many boards are unclear and poorly equipped to fulfill their roles. Baker and his co-authors suggest reasons for this situation and propose a framework to assist boards in providing effective governance. The CPSI tool kit is based on this framework.

Don Carlow's article questions why health boards should exist if they cannot make a difference in quality and safety. He challenges boards to invest at least as much time and resources in stewarding quality and safety as they do in overseeing financial performance.

Michael Heenan and his colleagues from St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton illustrate how they help their board define quality, set the quality agenda, monitor quality and influence a quality culture.

The article by Ron Robertson and Melanie Serjak summarizes The Ottawa Hospital's approach to recruiting a high-performance board.

Within my organization, the Saskatoon Health Region, we are working hard to become a high-performance organization. We know that this can only occur if we have a high-performing board. We are already applying lessons learned from these articles. I hope that many of you will also find this issue helpful in positioning your board as an essential component of your strategy for quality and safety.

– **Maura Davies**, president and chief executive officer, Saskatoon Health Region