

PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE THIRD SECTOR

The ambulance sector has an important, symbiotic relationship with the Air Ambulance Services. The challenge is that these Air Ambulance Services are generally charities with accountability to the Charity Commission and so Ambulance service boards have to develop effective partnership arrangements with them to build and maintain public confidence in the overall service.¹

Air Ambulance Services

Most of the Air Ambulance Services in the UK are run by charities. Some of these are NHS charities, and are closely integrated in the NHS, others are entirely independent. They provide a vital service, and yet in many cases, they are entirely independent of the board of the NHS Trust.

For some of the large, merged ambulance trusts, the Air Ambulance Service undertake a tiny proportion of their work, and these Trust boards may feel that they have other priorities to attend to as a board. In these cases, the Air Ambulance charity can feel disengaged and not well supported. This can reduce the effectiveness of the relationship between the board and the charity, and pose a subsequent risk to the effectiveness of the Air Ambulance service.

The lessons that have emerged to assist boards in managing this relationship are:

- Encourage the charity to develop very clear objects. So the charity is clear why it exists, how it adds value in relation to clinical outcomes and how these fit with the NHS aims.
- Clarify what the charity's priorities are. These include: saving more lives; reaching more patients more quickly – whether for very serious injury or more minor injuries in a remote place. Be really clear what is 'in scope' and what is 'out of scope'. Agree how performance will be measured and information shared.

¹ This case study has been developed from a discussion with Anthony Marsh, CE of West Midlands Ambulance who led a working group which developed 'A framework for a high performing ambulance service.' in August 2008.

- Clarify where responsibility for different aspects of management and governance lies. The resulting arrangement should be agreed in writing, for example in a Memorandum of Understanding.
- An important starting point is developing and maintaining a good relationship with the individual directors of the charity. This may include regular joint meetings.
- Where an Air Ambulance Service serves more than one NHS Ambulance Service, one organisation should take the lead on governance matters
- Give priority to reputation management, both internally and externally.
- Building public confidence underpins it all.

The last thing that the board wants is for people not to have confidence in the air ambulance service.

Anthony Marsh, Ambulance Trust Chief Executive