

### Building better working relationships

#### The challenge

Following the merger of two hospitals, the new medical director at a southern Trust was keen to create an environment committed to empowering clinicians.

Before approaching FMLM, the Trust had been subject to quality special measures, registering in the bottom 10% on the Medical Engagement Scale (MES). Consultants were disengaged and disillusioned by constant changes in senior leadership, dysfunctional practices and lack of strategy.

#### The solution

The programme was facilitated by a senior medical professional and a leadership development expert from FMLM. In the first phase of the programme medical leaders were encouraged to open-up, get to know each other and build trust - essential given the history of a lack of collaboration.

In the second phase, FMLM drew on organisational theory, anecdotes and real-world experiences to create a lively forum to challenge existing thinking and encourage collaboration. This was underpinned by using leadership and management strategies to demonstrate how to get people on side, how to work with different personalities and how to deal with difficult situations and challenging conversations.

Towards the end of the programme, one participant commented 'they changed the way we worked' encouraging the group to swap email for face-to-face meetings to help colleagues deal with issues clearly and constructively, using the language skills learned during the programme.

#### The results

An independent evaluation of the programme found:

- Improved collective learning among clinical leads – driving better communications, closer relationships, honesty and openness
- Improved self-awareness and emotional intelligence – helping consultants to understand one another and ask more open questions, rather than demanding answers and closure
- Increased belief and more positive role-modelling behaviours
- Improved attitudes and behaviours – instilling the belief that it's possible to set good examples, e.g. apologising when wrong, reporting incidents and learning from mistakes
- More honest and open communications – encouraging individuals to be more open about stress, mental health, departmental issues and reporting and resolving incidents
- Increased medical engagement versus previous MES score, which moved from red to green in 18 months
- Following the programme, the trust subsequently improved its Standardised Mortality Ratio from 115 to 101, Risk-Adjusted Mortality Index from 106 to 79.

*"They changed the way we worked; the programme was specific, tailored, small group work, not too tightly defined, driven by the participants based on their needs..."*