

Radical changes can be made only if the basic environment is stable

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EDITOR—There is no question that much is wrong in the organisation and management of the NHS.¹ The government's error is to think that it can solve the problems with structural change. A lesson I learnt from nine years on a hospital board was that management could make radical changes only if the basic environment was stable. In our case some radical developments took place in the way services were delivered, which contributed to solving problems of waiting times, responsiveness to patients' needs, and quality of care. These happened with the support of clinical staff.

There is no perfect structure. Function is more important than structure. The focus should be on making the existing arrangements work. An important starting point is to learn to leave things alone.

References

1. Smith J, Walshe K, Hunter DJ. The “redisorganisation” of the NHS. *BMJ* 2001; **323**: 1262–1263. (1 December.)

Doctors must have more managerial training

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EDITOR—Dare I predict that the next crisis will be because disillusioned managers leave the NHS and general practitioners are found not to have sufficient managerial (never mind leadership) skills to undertake the agenda now placed in their lap, and so the government agenda is not delivered and the public suffers?¹ This is but one scenario, and I hope I am wrong. Surely, though, one of the lessons of the events at Bristol is that without sufficient managerial (as opposed to professional) skill at the top of these large and complex organisations, professional skills alone will prove inadequate to meet the task.