



## Reflections on life as a RSPA

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If one word was to sum up the value of the Regional Specialty Professional Advisor, it would be communication. As I reflect on the last seven years in the role as RSPA for T&O in the Northern Region, I appreciate that as a valuable conduit for information dissemination from the College and Specialty Associations to the grass roots and vice versa, the RSPA is ideally placed. The evolution and implementation of commissioning rules is a perfect example. Given the current financial constraints within the NHS, there are few greater threats to our ability to maintain our high service standards, but at the same time commissioning changes offer us an opportunity that can be exploited. We have a platform that allows us to both emphasise areas of excellence in our practice, for example relating to the changes in arthroplasty practice that have emerged as a result of the National Joint Registry, and to shape service delivery based on high quality evidence, for example relating to the management of major trauma. The RSPA is perfectly positioned to facilitate both and is therefore a key member within our professional structure.

So, who should consider applying for this role? Some experience as a consultant is clearly needed but there is no reason why the RSPA should be nearing the end of his or her career. Some experience in trust management is helpful, as is involvement with training, but a desire to improve standards and an ability to both collect and disseminate information from and to the College and Specialty Associations and regional colleagues is perhaps the most vital.

Of course, there are frustrations. An important role of the RSPA should be to help assure the quality of the posts occupied by newly appointed consultants but sadly Foundation Trusts vary in their willingness to engage with the RSPA, with some actively distancing themselves, but with others keen to embrace what the RSPA has to offer. This variation is not in the interest of patients and needs to be challenged.

What is the commitment required to be an RSPA? The role overall is not particularly onerous. Attendance at the regular Regional Board meetings, perhaps three or four a year, is a fundamental requirement and in addition, national meetings, where a wide variety of relevant professional issues are discussed, are held once or twice a year. The running of regional specialty meetings is encouraged, and the College offers effective support through its Outreach teams. Approval of Job Descriptions for new consultant appointments is required as is attendance at Consultant appointment interviews with the volume of work varying according to region.

So, in summary, the RSPA is a rewarding role but one with challenges; it offers some degree of autonomy but is extensively supported. If this sounds appealing and if a role becomes available in your region, think about applying – you may look back after seven years and be grateful that you did!