



FOCUS ON: Huw Davies
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What does it mean to be a Chief Analytical Officer in healthcare?

There are many aspects to the role of Chief Analytical Officer that adds to the responsibilities that a non-board level role might have. The main one for me, and it is this aspect that sets it apart from other C-level roles, is the need to advocate for data as a leading contributor to the executive decision making process. Data has evolved from something that supports decision-making, into a field that must lead decision making. The board room should resound with statements such as, "The data is telling us this. What are we going to do about it?" rather than, "I think this, what data do we have to support this?". Data has no bias, it should be used to lead the process.

Why is this role important now and in the future?

This role is particularly crucial at the moment. In a time where the data field is fighting for professionalisation, it needs to have strong leaders at the head of decision-making within health and care in order to ensure that data is leading these decisions, not merely used to confirm bias. Professionalisation needs to see data as intelligence and not simply justification. As time goes on, this will become more apparent as AI takes a firmer hold in assessing causation and outcomes. It will then become the role of the CAO to highlight the limits of the data and encourage the discourse of opinion. Data is unlikely to discover anything by accident, that is the domain of people. Data will only ever know what we ask it to learn, at least until generative AI becomes out of date and ChatGPT becomes truly self-aware...

What are the key recruitment issues for a CAO over the next 5 years?

The first issue that needs addressing within data is the need for client facing analysts to be, in part, business analysts. It is not possible for a data analyst to know all about the intricacies of operations, nor for operations to become data specialists (the data literacy fallacy). Rather, data needs to engage with operations to understand their needs on a case by case basis. I am currently completing my PhD thesis on the subject and this form of shared experience is the best way of dealing with sharing understanding out from a data function. The second issue is one of creativity and adaptation. Data technology is advancing faster than ever before and we need people who can think laterally and creatively in order to quickly identify new applications for novel concepts. Someone who can see glass and think "that would make a great window"!