



FOCUS ON: Emma Wright (LFEDIP)
Director of Professional Development – AphA
Programme Director: Data Readiness
Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust

Why is the role of the CAO important now and in the future?

Data has becoming more and more prominent in health and care over the last few years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Having a senior leader within an organisation who can drive forward the data agenda, developing strategies to enable organisations to optimise their existing data assets but also looking to the future, particularly electronic patient records, where the structure of data is vital to enable organisations to become data-driven, using analytical techniques to support decision-making and improvements in care.

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

It is not just health and care that has seen an explosion in the use of data and other sectors are recruiting skilled professionals to unlock the data potential within their own organisations. The recruitment of data and analytics professionals is highly competitive, with other sectors able to offer greater financial incentives that the NHS or care sector can. Whilst this is a challenge, it provides the CAO with an opportunity to think beyond the financial rewards of a role in health and care. We are seeing the potential of a career development framework through the data and analytics National Competency Framework, and a drive to professionalise these roles, with professional registration and tailored CPD now being offered. As a profession, we need to be actively promoting the benefits of being a data or analytics professional within health and care, and developing analytical leaders of the future.

What are the key qualities a person needs to become a CAO?

A CAO needs to be able to apply analytical thinking to their organisation's challenges. Strong leadership is key to both inspire analytical and data teams but also to lead the organisation into a 'data first' mentality, where analysing the data becomes the de facto approach to managing organisational problems. I would also say personal resilience is key; analytical outputs will be challenged, results will be contentious and having the resilience drive forward change is critical.

And always be curious. The fast pace of change in data means any CAO must be able to keep abreast of latest development and be able to see the potential of new techniques and approaches to benefit health and care.