



"I TEND TO BE A GLASS HALF FULL PERSON"

By Alison Moore · 26 March 2018

Tom Cahill, HSJ's Chief Executive of the Year 2017, was described by judges as an authentic, inspirational leader. Here he talks to Alison Moore about getting mental health services on the map

Tom Cahill is not a man to blow his own trumpet. But this time last year, staff at his trust chose to do it for him and nominate him as chief executive of the year.

And Mr Cahill, the inspirational leader of Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust, was shocked to win the title in last year's HSJ awards.

For Mr Cahill, even his inclusion on the short list came as a complete surprise. He had been nominated by his team and went along to the awards ceremony with no expectation of winning.

It was only as the award was being announced that he realised he was the person being described.

"I genuinely had no idea," he says. "Afterwards a lot of people have been in contact, and I have been asked to a lot more events. I'm just preparing to speak to a group of doctors about leadership and being a chief executive. You tend to get profiled a bit more."

"I think the response in my organisation has been tremendous. It does put you on the map a bit more."

In the months since he won, he has stepped down from his role leading the Hertfordshire and West Essex Sustainability and Transformation Partnership – although he remains heavily involved in work within the STP with a two days a week commitment. However, he argued successfully that the STP needed a full time lead, rather than someone who combined it with running a trust or other organisation.

His trust is expecting a Care Quality Commission inspection imminently so preparing for that has been important. It is currently rated good but Mr Cahill hopes it may get

outstanding in at least the well led domain – perhaps his award will help, he suggests (the trust also got board of the year in the HSJ awards in 2014).

Mental health leadership

But in one way last year's awards were groundbreaking: both HSJ chief executive of the year and HSJ provider trust of the year were won by the mental health sector. Mr Cahill suggests that mental health leadership is getting more profile across the system.

"Mental health is much more on the map. There is the commitment to parity and around mental health standards. What may be new is the recognition of what mental health leaders have done in terms of transformation."

Mental health has moved closer to the patient and into the community much earlier than other services, he points out, and services have been rapidly transformed.

In 2016, his trust formed an alliance with Hertfordshire

Community Trust, aimed at enhancing joint working around mental and physical health with some co-location of services.

It is also one of the pilot trusts developing new care models for children's and adolescents services and has successfully expanded its geographical reach, taking on specialist learning disability services in Buckinghamshire.

His advice to other trusts is to put their chief executives forward for the chief executive of the year title. At a time when the NHS is under pressure and staff are working

hard, recognition and rewarding staff can be one of the things which help maintain morale – whether it is big prestigious national awards or something more low key and local.

“You can either look at the glass half full or the glass half empty,” he says. “Even though we are under pressure there is major change going on. I tend to be a glass half full person. And it is nice to be recognised!”

What the judges said

The panel of judges felt Mr Cahill was an authentic, inspirational leader who put

service users and their families at the very heart of what he and his organisation were doing. Feedback on him was universally positive, recognising his empathy and passionate commitment. He was committed to diversity and inclusion, as well as authentic co-production, and had the ability to look through other people's eyes.

The HSJ Awards 2018 are now open for entries. [Click](#) for more information on the Chief Executive of the Year category or contact [Chris Edwards](#), Awards Director, HSJ.

To find out more about the 2018 HSJ Awards
visit awards.hsj.co.uk

Or contact **Ryan Saunders**: **E:** ryan.saunders@wilmingtonhealthcare.com **T:** +44 (0) 207 608 9043