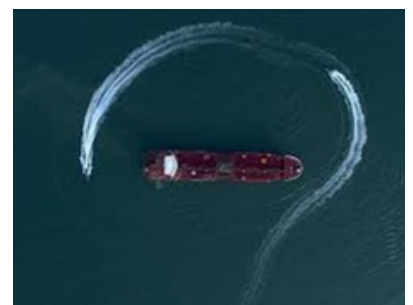


## Care Aims and Flexibility

### You can't turn a tanker around like a speedboat. Or can you?

The NHS can be likened to a super tanker. It is a vast vessel charted on a course of doing the most good, least harm, for the most people, in a fair way. The pandemic has highlighted that this ambition requires considerable flexibility. The success of health services in achieving this flexibility questions the assumption that an 'oil tanker organisation' can't manoeuvre like a speedboat.



There are multiple factors that have contributed to the amazing response by NHS staff and other public services. Arguably one of these is increased freedom to act. This has in-part been achieved through relaxation of some top-down governance requirements during the pandemic. To milk the metaphor, the service has been freed-up to operate like a flotilla of speedboats sailed by individual practitioners. Rather than as a super tanker led by the officer of the watch.

This raises questions about how the component parts of the NHS can continue to operate autonomously but still all be directed towards the organisation's collective aim. The Care Aims framework provides a set of principles that focus the decision making of every employee on the service's overarching duty to do the most good, least harm, for the most people, in a fair way. In essence it provides a way of ensuring that each sailor in the flotilla is headed in the same direction whilst at the same time being able to respond in the moment to the micro-currents, waves, and unique circumstances surrounding them.

Teams and services implementing the Care Aims framework report increased staff morale arising from a greater sense of autonomy and trust, services that are more able to listen and respond to what matters to each person they work with, and better targeting of limited resources. Moreover, the framework provides a way of making and recording decisions that offers line of sight as an alternative to lengthy governance and feedback loops between the officer of the watch and the sailors charged with carrying out their orders. This line of sight also facilitates timely reflection on what works and for who. This in turn contributes to a process of continuous service improvement.