COMMENT

LGBT nurses can fight prejudice with Pride

Across the health service there is still a long way to go to eradicate homophobia, but one trust took a first step at this year’s Pride event.

Earlier this year, I did something I have never done before. It isn’t often I get to do something new at my age, but this summer I marched at London Pride openly as a nurse. I have attended London Pride many times before with friends and LGBT organisations, but never representing my profession. This year, a group of staff from my trust organised to take part in the march, with our employer’s support.

On Pride Saturday on 6 July, LGBT and non-LGBT colleagues together donned our bright yellow t-shirts with the trust’s name and logo emblazoned across them, took our placards bearing our name – Whittington Health Staff Inclusion Network – and got ready to march.

Inclusivity in the NHS

Marching in Pride openly as NHS staff was an amazing feeling, made even better by the reaction we received from the crowds. People smiled and waved at us, clapping and cheering, and seemed so happy to see us.

For many LGBT patients the NHS is still not an inclusive or safe place. A report by LGBT charity Stonewall, published in November last year, said one in four LGBT people have witnessed homophobia from NHS staff, and one in seven have avoided treatment because of fear of discrimination from NHS staff.

This isn’t the first report from Stonewall highlighting poor treatment of LGBT patients – there have been many over the years, all showing similar results. We talk a lot about person-centred care in nursing, but when so many LGBT people do not feel able to be open about themselves for fear of discrimination, are we just paying lip service to it? What is the NHS doing to reverse the situation?

Making safe spaces for patients and staff

A recent analysis by The Guardian newspaper shows that rather than improving, the situation in our society could be getting worse; homophobic and transphobic crimes, including stalking, harassment and violent assault, have risen dramatically in recent years.

Between 2014 and 2018, LGBT hate crime rose by 144% in England and Wales. What my colleagues and I did at Pride may not seem like a great step forward, but the reaction of the crowd was breathtaking. People cheered us on because they were happy and grateful for us being there.

Our presence told them that we are working towards making our trust a safe place for LGBT patients and staff, where people are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

A message for the LGBT population

We still have work to do to make our trust a safe place for all, but we are getting there.

Every journey starts with a single step – ours began with marching at London Pride. It would be great to see more NHS staff, backed by their employers, taking part in Pride celebrations across the country, representing their organisations.

It would show the LGBT population that we value and respect them as individuals and go a long way towards making the NHS a safe place for all.

By Drew Payne
community staff nurse at Whittington Health in London

Unequal treatment: the disturbing experience of LGBT people in the UK today rcni.com/LGBT_experience

nursingstandard.com