

# A personal story of Black History within the NHS



**As Black History Month comes to an end, Zandie Mpofu, HR temporary workforce manager at RBCH, talks about her personal experiences of inequality in the health system and how she is helping to change this culture.**

My initial experience working with the NHS was in my early 20s as a registered nurse in London.

I would like to think I was a fairly quietly confident person from my youth but in an environment where you are conscious you are the minority, and have feelings of invisibility, it has the potential to make you feel smaller than you actually are. I remember struggling to defend myself or indeed challenge when comments I considered derogatory were made. I took the cowardly sidestep rather than be vocal about it. I was not convinced my voice would be heard.

The decision to move to the South Coast from London has turned out to be the best for my daughter's education and more importantly for myself. Very early on working here at RBCH, I had the confidence and maturity to feel empowered to express the overt experiences I came across all those years ago and was humbled to have a manager who tackled it well.

When the opportunity to progress was in my path, I went about seeking validation from one person to the next. Three people stood out for me and to this day I value that steer and the confidence in my abilities. Their feedback was consistent and there was no expression of doubt or barrier in my ability to step up.

It does take considerable effort and self-belief to be determined in your path and not let anything or anyone convince you otherwise. Finding that coach or mentor, that go to person is incredibly powerful and encouraging as well. I continue to seek and have that support consistently.



One of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Network's first initiatives here at Royal Bournemouth is encouraging employees from minority groups to act as mentors to other staff in positions of influence within the organisation.

Having the opportunity to have a one to one with a senior leader can be really empowering; the potency of conversation and insight cannot be understated. Our senior leaders can only be better equipped to support our Black, Asian and minority ethnic workforce by listening and seeing through the lens of those that feel disadvantaged.

My daughter is a generation that will be part of sustaining the workforce of the future including the NHS. I have a responsibility to protect and passionately want to inspire her about possibilities, her dreams, her capabilities and her determinations. I want to continue to inject positivity to her and the possibilities however big or small.

We all have insecurities, we all have dreams; we all have biases; we absolutely all need to have self-belief. After-all we are all human. Race discussions must not only be characterised by colour-blind rhetoric. Let us recognise and accept the social structures that exist, re-enforcing racial inequalities - discrimination can still be an everyday occurrence, whether in or out of the workplace. We need to be consistent and united in creating an environment and culture of understanding and accepting our differences. In so doing, we empower and inject confidence for those that don't have it in them.

Let us not define our workforce by colour, ethnicity, gender, whatever it is, but by the potential and contribution of each individual. We all need to be kind to each other, support each other, recognise and tap into potential leaders, develop them for the benefit of an incredibly unique useful public service!

I believe it is everyone's personal responsibility to hunger for development and chase it but it is also okay to be content, happy and take pride in whatever part you play in the NHS. It's also easy to doubt your abilities but also consciously or subconsciously draw conclusions from scenarios that are not favourable to you. I want to encourage every minority that dares to dream and is driven to make it reality.

I am pleased to note the huge steps and progress to address equality of opportunities and inclusion within the NHS.

My message is anyone with self-doubt? Dare to be confident in your abilities and echo the message that Maya Angelou, American poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist, said: 'Still I rise...'.

## Black History Month

Black History Month is an annual observance that commemorates the history and achievements of members of the black community.

First launched in London in the 1980s, it was originally founded to recognise the contributions that people of African and Caribbean backgrounds have made to this country over many generations.

Now Black History Month has expanded to include the history of not just Afro-Caribbean black people but all black people in general.

Throughout history black people have always been present in the UK but there has been a lack of representation in the history books.

The aim is to remember and celebrate the forgotten or overlooked people who have helped to shape the UK.