

Reflecting on a comment from a patient on my race

Today I will be reflecting on my experience of getting an inappropriate comment surrounding my race from a patient and how I was encouraged by my supervisor to open an honest conversation with my team, to show how I don't tolerate this behaviour.

In my first week of my placement, I went on a visit with the Band 5 physiotherapist on my team. By this time, I was given the opportunity to lead on some outcome measures and exercises, so I was very excited to practice what I had been watching and learning all week. As I was going through the session with the patient I got a comment "Where is your family from?" to which I just gave a short hand answer to, to avoid further probing. Although in myself I knew it wasn't okay. Why should I be asked just because I'm a different colour, why didn't this patient also ask the white physiotherapist with me? Am I not considered British because of the colour of my skin?

Prior to this placement, the university did a really good job of providing training and an outlet to students who identify as BAME. To teach us from students own experiences that these things may happen on placement, but that doesn't mean they're acceptable.

This was running through my mind as I was treating this patient. However, I also didn't want to cause a fuss and potentially ruin the session as it was my first time leading. Which I now realise put me in an uncomfortable position. Looking back now, I should have said something then to stop the patient or even the physiotherapist to seek advice.

Later on, the patient went on to make a few more comments, which I feel were slightly jeering such as the state of Africa and the family dynamics in African culture. Had I spoke up after the first comment those comments may not have occurred.

At this point, I did feel comfortable to bring up how I felt with the physiotherapist. However, I had to rush back in another direction. Therefore, there wasn't the opportunity to de-brief about what happened, and by the next time I was in I didn't deem the situation important enough to bring up.

It was only when I had my half way catch up with my supervisor, that she highlighted the importance of speaking up and showing that I don't condone this type of behaviour. Because, people are watching you and if you don't speak up they will think you don't necessarily care or maybe even agree on something. She really motivated me to speak to the physiotherapist and my clinical educator to offload how the incident made me feel and speak against it.

When it came to the time, I still felt scared and like it wasn't important but I knew deep down it was and I'm glad I was encouraged by my supervisor because that acted as a form of external motivation to go ahead.

So I ended up bringing it up with my team and it was really well received. I got to learn about their similar experiences and what stood out to me was when the physiotherapist said 'It's better to have a united team over someone feeling saddened from a patient'.

I was then given the opportunity to speak to another BAME member of the team, to learn about ways to communicate with patients if these things ever come up.

I'm so grateful for the team and how they responded and supported me and for my supervisor who stood up for me, when I wouldn't myself.

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