



Discriminatory language and behaviour in the workplace

At the end of October an ITV news interview provoked a lot of debate, after a surgeon of South Asian heritage revealed a patient had asked for a white doctor to perform a procedure instead of him. Mr Radhakrishna Shanbhag said he would have left the NHS if it was not for his family responsibilities and felt he would not be supported by his managers to challenge racism from patients.

We asked a number of our London LMC officers whether they had experienced discrimination from patients in general practice. We learned that:

Directly racist language is rare, but common forms of discrimination included patients saying they could not understand what BAME doctors were saying, refusing to attempt to pronounce non-English names and asking BAME staff where they are from.

BAME doctors frequently experience comments they perceived to be low-level racism and not worth challenging patients on, but they do value it when colleagues recognise they are facing this problem and when others support them to challenge patients.

Most respondents said they discounted abuse from people with mental health and drug/alcohol problems, because this can be symptomatic of illness rather than genuine prejudice.

There was also praise from some doctors about the fact the majority of patients are tolerant and open minded. One London GP who was born overseas said “my overriding impression has always been how tolerant this country has been, and I admire the frequent messages in the media that racism of any kind is not tolerated”.

Anyone who has experienced, or is experiencing, racism within the general practice workplace can contact Londonwide LMCs for advice on what steps to take and who can help. We are working on guidance which will be circulated in due course.