



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

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5th November 2019

Dear Colleagues,

I love our NHS. It's there for us at some of the best and worst times in our lives and is an institution we should all be incredibly proud of.

The NHS is what it is thanks only to the hard work and dedication of each and every one of you. Our incredible staff make the NHS great. Without you, our wonderful NHS would not be able to deliver for millions of people across our country in the way it does.

So I was horrified last week to see accounts of the abuse that many of you face whilst doing your job. Abuse of any member of NHS staff is completely unacceptable. It is absolutely appalling that many of these incidents are racially motivated.

Like me, you may have seen the shocking testimony of Radhakrishna Shanbhag, a hard-working doctor who has committed more than 20 years of his life to the NHS. In an exceptionally moving interview this week, he described the racial abuse that he had been subjected to whilst working as a part of the NHS. Racial abuse that made him feel worthless. Abuse so foul that it made him reconsider his position in the NHS.

I have seen for myself racist abuse of staff, on night shifts in hospitals. Such racism is awful, and something that no staff member should have to endure. Especially troubling is the feeling among some staff that they need to accept this humiliation because they can't be sure they will be backed up if they challenge it.

So I want to send a clear message, from the very top of our health and care system, with the strong support of the entire national leadership of the NHS: this sort of abuse is unacceptable and we will not tolerate it.

If you face abuse, do not accept it. If you see a colleague being abused, do not ignore it. If you know of an employee facing this, do not stand for it. This government takes

a zero-tolerance approach to dealing with racist abuse whenever it arises. Things should be no different in our NHS.

If a patient asks to be treated by a white doctor, the answer is “no”. Your management must and will always back you up. We are very proud that everyone in the UK is entitled to healthcare at the point of delivery, according to need not ability to pay. No one is entitled to choose the colour of the skin of the person giving that healthcare.

Those working on the frontline dedicate themselves to delivering world-class care for their patients and it is unacceptable that anyone would want to harm or abuse them for whatever reason – but especially on the basis of their race. Staff of all backgrounds should rightfully expect to work in an NHS that exhibits a healthy, inclusive, and compassionate culture: a culture where abuse and violence have no part. We all need to act to ensure racism in our NHS is eradicated. It is not the responsibility of those who suffer racist abuse to challenge it alone.

You will be aware that the interim NHS People Plan, published in June 2019, set out the initial framework for how the NHS will become the best place to work, to achieve the fantastic workplace culture that all NHS staff deserve. As a part of the interim People Plan, each NHS organisation must continue their work to improve the wellbeing of their staff in this regard. The national bodies of the NHS must also continue to support NHS trusts to meet the right of staff to work free from violence and abuse, as set out in the NHS Constitution and enshrined in law.

Making the NHS the best place to work must extend beyond the eradication of racial abuse, to fully supporting people from BAME backgrounds in all aspects of their career in the NHS. The Workforce Race Equality Standard is a fundamental component of the support BAME staff receive and should be implemented by each NHS trust. NHS Trusts must also continue to demonstrate to the local commissioner, staff, CQC and its Board that it is making progress against any locally-led improvement targets related to Workforce Race Equality Standard.

To those of you in senior management positions within Trusts, I would be grateful if you would reiterate to your hard-working and dedicated staff that we consider the racial abuse of NHS staff to be completely unacceptable. I therefore expect that all appropriate steps are taken by organisations to ensure their staff know they can come to a workplace that is free from abuse and harassment. It must be clear to everyone who works for the NHS that they have the full support of the government and NHS in tackling racism towards staff.

And to all of you working every day to improve the lives of patients across our country, please know that you have my full support in challenging racism and discrimination wherever you see it. No person should ever feel worthless because of racial abuse. Particularly the extraordinary individuals, like Radhakrishna Shanbhag, who have dedicated their lives to improving the lives of others.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MATT HANCOCK