

Viewpoints



Race and Racism in Primary Care

The *Black Lives Matter* campaign has highlighted issues of race and racism which are present in all parts of our communities and organisations. BJGP Open is inviting Viewpoints to document experiences of racism in primary care as a patient, practitioner, trainee, or researcher.

This initiative sits outside the usual BJGP Open framework for research and commentary, and has been created as a rapid access format for sharing information.

What is your full name?

Anonymous

What is your role?

Practitioner

Please describe the experience of race and/or racism that you would like to share

Racism is endemic in our society. At the age of 14 I concluded to a group of friends rather controversially 'I think everyone is racist'. My friends were taken aback and didn't know how to respond apart from denying it. I suppose I was trying to articulate 'unconscious bias'; 'bias' because judgements are made about someone based on their perceived racial background and 'unconscious' because these prejudices are so pervasive that it is now ignored, accepted or minimised by that majority and will occur without self-questioning.

Racism is damaging. I am proudly of south-east Asian and West Indian origin but the usual denominator I go by is 'Oriental'. From an early age I experienced racist, derogatory comments on looking Chinese. Having got into medical school I was optimistic that things would be different. That was until in my 3rd year a paediatric consultant (a white male) was teaching a large group about genetic abnormalities. He was discussing Trisomy 21 when he approached me and pointed towards me. He explained to the class that my eyes resembled those of epicanthic folds, as for a Down's syndrome child. I was stunned. None of my peer group challenged the consultant or spoke to me about it afterwards. I wonder if they even noticed it was wrong because racism is so endemic and casual.

Five years ago on walking into the practice where I was a GP locum I had racial slurs heckled at me by 3 teenage schoolboys. During the COVID-19 pandemic I was triaging an elderly man with recurrent blepharitis. He was very upset to not attend hospital but to self-care. He ended the consultation wanting my name, I attempted to spell a simplified version, but he exclaimed he 'couldn't understand it because it sounded Chinese'.

Those were just a few examples but I could name many more. I hope that going forwards the medical community make definitive improvements and create accountability for racist abuse in all its forms. Furthermore, it should no longer be acceptable to say "why don't you just ignore it?" as one GP partner told me.

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