

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?

Dr Silvana Unigwe

What is your role?

GP

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

The year 2020 has been significant for many reasons, one of which is that racial discrimination, in particular against black people, is now being widely and openly discussed. I have been humbled by the outpourings of so many about the memories and scars of traumatic events in their lives, in which they were treated as “less than”, purely on the basis of their ethnicity and skin colour.

In my medical career, I too have experienced racism which raises its ugly head in various guises. Some instances were easy to shake off; others threatened to destroy me.

I remember having a boss who wasn't keen on having junior doctors from my part of the world, and was very open about this. However, when he got to know me personally, his outlook transformed and he went on to champion me. Although his initial overt prejudice was inappropriate and unhelpful, I respect him for being willing to change his mind and accept he had been wrong. The people who bother me the most are those who are careful to always be on the right side of political correctness, but who harbour deep, enduring, unchangeable beliefs that 'black is inferior'. They will not be caught shouting racist abuse or saying anything explicitly prejudiced. However, they block the aspirations and progress of their colleagues, and cause arguably more damage to the psyche of the black medic.

At the root of many of the world's ills lies fear. It can seem easier to stick to what one knows, to gravitate to people that look and sound the same as us. Yet this attitude to life is limiting and dangerous. A healthier approach would be to view differences in others with openness and curiosity. We are likely to find that there is more that binds us together as humans than separates us.

I would like to end by thanking all my colleagues, past and present, who have embraced me in all my blackness. You know who you are ...

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