

ROLE MODEL

Akeem Sule

The consultant psychiatrist tells **Adrian O'Dowd** why his love of TV, film, and music helps him to inspire colleagues to treat patients more humanely



Patients aren't just a cluster of symptoms—they have lives and they have interests

NOMINATED BY OLUFEMI TALABI

"Dr Sule has been an incredible asset to my career. He was supportive as my clinical supervisor during my first year of core training and went out of his way to do both regular clinical and exam preparatory supervision sessions with me even with his severe clinical pressures. He ensured that my educational needs were prioritised as a trainee.

"He has been very helpful with navigating training and exam challenges. He keeps in contact to offer words of encouragement and practical advice.

"I've found his work in transcultural psychiatry to be inspiring, especially around discussing popular culture and black mental health."

Olufemi Talabi is a third year core psychiatry trainee at the East of England Deanery.

NOMINATE A ROLE MODEL

To nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, job title, and the reason for your nomination to arimmer@bmj.com

Treating patients as human beings with a wide range of interests, and identities beyond their health problems, is perhaps what makes consultant psychiatrist Akeem Sule so popular with colleagues and those he mentors.

"I will discuss fashion, books, and TV shows with patients," Sule says. "I'm interested in their world, and that enables you to engage on a deeper level. I'm always trying to teach that to junior doctors."

He adds, "I remember we had a patient who was interested in Cliff Richard. We both started singing 'The Young Ones' and the junior doctors were cringing, but that was a real connection with the patient. I was trying to tell them that your patients aren't just a cluster of symptoms—they have lives and they have interests."

Sule qualified in 1997 in Nigeria before coming to work in the UK. He decided to specialise in psychiatry early on, partly inspired by his mother who was a psychiatric nurse.

Now a locum consultant psychiatrist mostly based at

Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, Sule feels strongly about his work.

"I like the breadth, length, and height of psychiatry," he says. "It's the only specialty that makes you think about the vulnerabilities of people with mental health problems as well as thinking about their social conditions, housing, and the effects of austerity measures."

Tapping into that is where his interests and hobbies come to the fore. "I've always been interested in movies and TV shows and particularly those that focus on social determinants of health. I've done talks and published articles, for example, on the TV show *The Wire*.

"Everything you can think of—TV shows, music, film—can teach you something about mental health."

In 2012, Sule, along with neuroscientist Becky Inkster, co-founded Hip Hop Psych—a social venture designed to bridge the gap between the medical community and hip hop culture.

Sule is also research associate at Wolfson College,

Fufu, the African cassava dish extolled by Sule (above)



University of Cambridge. "I've been teaching medical students in Cambridge since 2007 and you can see the excitement in their eyes when you talk about films such as *Scarface* and the impact of cocaine mixed with alcohol on people's mental health. You see them coming alive."

Sule is a strong advocate for mentoring and is a member of the Association of Black Psychiatrists UK. He mentors trainees and Cambridge students, especially those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and keeps in contact with his former mentees to offer encouragement and advice.

"It's important to do that for the next generation of doctors," he says. "The NHS is at a crisis point and lots of doctors don't want to continue." He adds, "With young doctors I'm often struck by how they feel as if they are being swallowed up by medicine and they don't have time for other aspects of their life."

His advice is simple. "Be passionate about the profession and bring all your skills, energies, and interests to it. Don't feel that, just because you're a doctor, you can't have another life. Those interests you have, they help you to understand your patient better."

Adrian O'Dowd, *The BMJ*

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