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Championing transgender rights: specialty doctor Kate Nambiar

The specialty doctor in sexual health and gender identity medicine talks to **Marika Davies** about the importance of being a good doctor and a good person.

Marika Davies

All doctors should use their privileged place in society to make a difference, says Kate Nambiar. "People will listen to what we say for better or worse, and that privilege comes with a responsibility to use it wisely," she says.

Nambiar has used her privilege to advocate for trans healthcare. "I'm a trans woman and I've made trans healthcare a big focus of my work," she says.

As a medical student at Oxford University, Nambiar encountered considerable negativity from her peers when she began her gender transition. Her tutor was outraged by their reactions. "He said it's not our role to make judgements of people, it's our job to accept people for who they are and to support them in whatever journey they're on," recalls Nambiar. Although grateful for the support of the university, Nambiar was keen to make a new start and moved to London for her clinical training. She found that the challenges of this impacted negatively on her studies. The medical school assigned Nambiar a personal tutor who, along with her GP, provided invaluable support during some difficult times. "Both of them were amazing doctors, but it wasn't just the medicine, it was more the humanity that made the difference," she says.

This approach has stayed with Nambiar in her own practice as a doctor. "Sometimes as medics we get caught up in the job and forget the importance of not just being a good doctor but being a good person as well," she says.

As a junior doctor Nambiar tried different specialties and completed a doctorate in immunology and bioinformatics, but gravitated towards a career in sexual health. "You know when you find the people you're going to gel with," she says. "It's not a complicated job that we do but it's one that relies on human interaction and I love that."

Initially Nambiar did not want gender to be a part of her work, preferring instead to move on from her past. "I had some internalised feelings of transphobia, which is not uncommon among trans people as we live in a world that demonises us," she explains.

In 2012 she agreed to help set up a trans specific clinic (now known as Clinic T) in response to a request from the trans community in Brighton. She found the experience both exciting and humbling. "We had people from the community come in to train us and it was humbling to realise the huge power discrepancy in the interactions between doctor and patient, so trying to tackle that was one of the aims of the service," she says.

The clinic was set up to meet sexual and reproductive health needs, but Nambiar found there was great demand from people seeking gender identity work. She decided to get the necessary training and now splits her role between Clinic T and the Tavistock and Portman Gender Identity Clinic in London.

Nambiar was recently part of a team at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals that produced guidance on gender inclusive language in perinatal care. The aim was not to replace existing language but to make pregnancy care a more inclusive place. "You can imagine if you're a trans man who is pregnant coming into a pregnancy service that it's an alien place to be," she says. "We want to be able to be inclusive and talk about pregnant people if they're not pregnant women; we don't have to call everyone a mother."

Although she was frustrated by the backlash the guidance received, Nambiar says the experience shows why it is important for doctors to speak up. "There was a reason that we did that work, which is highlighted by the fact that there is so much negativity out there," she says. "Don't be afraid to stick your head above the parapet."

Nominated by Alison Berner

Kate Nambiar has an interesting portfolio career which includes clinical and lab research, training in multiple specialties, and educating colleagues and trainees. She is involved in a lot of activism for the trans community, including working to support trans medical students. She often shares her story and experience to help advise others. She is a role model to me and I am sure she will be for doctors at all stages in their career.

Alison Berner is a specialty trainee in medical oncology and adult gender identity