



Letter to the Editor

Letter to the editor: How well is the NHS set up for issues surrounding gender identity?



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Dear Editor,

On an Emergency list recently, we had a patient who was a trans female. She was written on the board as M(F) and had been placed in a side room. This got me thinking how well are we set up in the NHS for our community of patients who are transgender, non-binary, transitioning or otherwise.

When you become conscious of gender identity, the male/female divide within the NHS seems stark. A consent form has a tick box to say whether you are male or female. Bays in wards or even whole wards are segregated by sex. Toilets are often gender specific.

Some hospitals have developed policies which state that trans people have equal rights to access single sex wards as any other man or woman and therefore should be admitted to a ward in accordance with their preferred gender [1]. This hit the news headlines earlier this year when this was questioned as contradicting a policy to eliminate mixed sex wards [2].

There have been strives nationally to improve equality for transgender individuals with the Gender Recognition Act 2004 [3] and the Equality Act 2010 [4]. However, it seems we are still falling short. In a parliamentary inquiry in to gender equality in 2015–2016 it stated that:

‘We have found that the NHS is letting down trans people, with too much evidence of an approach that can be said to be discriminatory and in breach of the Equality Act.’ [5].

A report by Stonewall (a campaigner for LGBT equality) showed that when accessing general healthcare services in the last year, two in five trans people (41%) said healthcare staff lacked understanding of trans health needs [6].

Certainly, I think we need to make sure there are good hospital guidelines and policies on how to improve the experience of transgender individuals within the NHS. I think that issues surrounding gender identity should also be incorporated into education and continuing professional development so that going forward we can serve this community better and with equality.

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References

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