



'People just want to be seen as people'



The Role of Kindness in Reducing Health Inequalities

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ABSTRACT

Kindness facilitates interpersonal interactions, team dynamics and policies. It creates the trust necessary to hold challenging conversations while maintaining relationships and creates psychologically safe working and learning environments (Judt, cited in Ballat et al., 2020). Kindness is a mindset, a value and an attitude that can be role modelled, critically challenged and taught in different modalities from podcasts to traditional face to face workshops. When patients are treated with kindness, health inequalities are reduced and quality of care and clinician wellbeing are improved (Potter et al 2024, Voorhees et al. 2022).

The importance of kindness has been recognised by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and the General Medical Council (GMC). The January 2024 update to Good Medical Practice issued guidelines that doctors should be kind to patients and colleagues, whilst the RCGP state that to complete training as a GP, the doctor must be able to demonstrate they treat patients with kindness and compassion (GMC 2024, RCGP 2018). There is evidence to show that as people go through medical training they become less empathic (Mountford 2024).

In this sequence of teaching sessions we demonstrated the link between kindness and improvement of health equity and provided attendees with practical ways to bring kindness to the consultation. The ability of the individual to affect change was critically discussed, with attendees encouraged to consider kindness as applied within a system, a team, within a consultation and to oneself. The teaching sessions demonstrated learning through sharing of personal reflection and feedback.

METHODS

A literature search, interviews with service users and those working with inclusion groups revealed that patients value building a relationship with their primary care provider. When this is allowed to happen, health inequalities are reduced (Potter et al 2024). We considered how kindness underpins the principles of trauma informed care. The authors engaged with the global movement for kindness in healthcare, particularly the monthly 'Conversations for Kindness'.

Education sessions in different formats were developed and delivered both remotely and in person to groups of Primary Care professionals, mainly GPs. Feedback from these sessions was collected through MS Forms, the QR code for which was shared at the end of sessions. A podcast was recorded with Wessex Local Medical Committees (LMC), which was shared both by the authors and colleagues. It is currently being used as a recommended resource in regional LMC safeguarding training.

Future plans include the creation of a kindness measure for use by the Training Hub to ensure sustainability of the authors work beyond the end of the funded Fellowship.

RESULTS

87% attendees rated sessions as either very useful (5/5) or useful (4/5)

Examples of written feedback collected from MS Forms

'The small group work within the session was great... particularly regarding the presence of kindness (in) Good Medical Practice'	'Good for helping improve work stresses, creating a positive culture'	'There are so many aspects to the current state of healthcare in the UK that are outside of our control... and bring out the worst in us'
'Maintaining kindness, idea of a resilience pot'	'Enlightening and helpful'	'Compassionately delivered, thought provoking and well evidenced - thank you, both'
'Gives us a reminder of why we decided to be doctors/GPs'	'It felt like a safe space to talk'	'Kindness to self improves the chances of being kind to patients'

CONCLUSIONS

Education sessions centred on the theme of kindness in healthcare are well received and should be prioritised as part of both GP training and ongoing CPD in Primary Care.

While sessions were grounded in tackling health inequalities, this learning and opportunity for reflection is relevant across all aspects of healthcare. Kindness is central to creating conditions to tackle Health Inequalities and is an accessible and achievable mindset that all can adopt.

The biggest challenge voiced was that when under pressure, as in the current NHS environment, the capacity of the individual to show kindness is reduced. This can be improved through placing kindness at the centre of teams and system development, which will allow practitioners to treat patients, colleagues, and themselves with kindness.

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