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Shining a spotlight on 'Unconscious Bias'

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Unconscious Bias explained

- Unconscious bias refers to when somebody forms a quick opinion about a situation or person without being consciously aware of it.
- Our brains naturally form biases by using knowledge of stereotypes, cultures, and other assumptions of the situation or individual.
- Unconscious bias is often unfair. It can be used to create labels and stereotypes about other people based on particular characteristics.

- Unconscious bias can occur in any situation, but it is commonly experienced in the workplace.
 - The Equality Act 2010 gives those affected a voice to raise concerns and formally challenge unfair treatment.
- Unconscious biases can hinder decisionmaking, impact team dynamics and leadership styles, and limit company diversity.

This, in turn, can reduce equal opportunities for team members and job applicants.

WMAS have introduced training sessions on unconscious bias which will be run by their Trust Diversity & Inclusion Lead – when required – to support staff in the following ways:

- Educate and understand how environmental factors may have had an influence.
- ✓ Encourage open discussion
- ✓ Consider the thoughts and understanding of theses types of issues/events
- ✓ Treat each case as individually way and following due process



Benefits will include the embedding of a positive way forward which will support staff and provide the opportunity to involve staff in managing scenarios in the following way in the future -

- To allow all involved an equal opportunity to speak
- To discuss what further training may be helpful
- To offer a safe space where staff can raise any worries or concerns
- The opportunity to provide feedback on further ways to address future issues in general

Equality & Inclusion: A Case Study

What was the issue to address?

- Allegations of racial comments were made at a WMAS Hub made within the crew room and subsequent concerns raised with the Operations Manager.
- A formal investigation was completed during which several staff identified within the room at the time were interviewed.
- The investigation highlighted that no one else within the room had challenged the behaviour.
- Although the comments made were not made with malicious intent, the findings
 pointed towards unconscious bias as a factor, especially in reference to the
 BAME protected characteristic of staff involved.

What did we do?

Nature of Concern & Investigation

- A formal investigation took place which found that the alleged racial comments made left the victim 'stunned' and 'incredibly hurt'
- The conclusion of the investigation found there was a case to answer.
- Unconscious Bias to be explored due to the racist undertone of the comments

Actions & Decision

- Specialist advice was sought from the Trust Diversity & Inclusion lead
- Investigation was reviewed and wider
 Trust implications considered
- It was decided that resolution of the investigation by means of training/ education/ reflection would provide a positive resolution to this incident.



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Perpetrator Training

- A training session was completed by the those involved in the incident led by the Trust Diversity & Inclusion Lead.
- Open discussion of the incident allowing the staff to describe what other environmental factors were involved, their thoughts and understanding of the event.
- Staff members acknowledged their own failings in this incident, not recognising the impact of their comments at the time, displaying great disappointment and regret for the incident occurring.

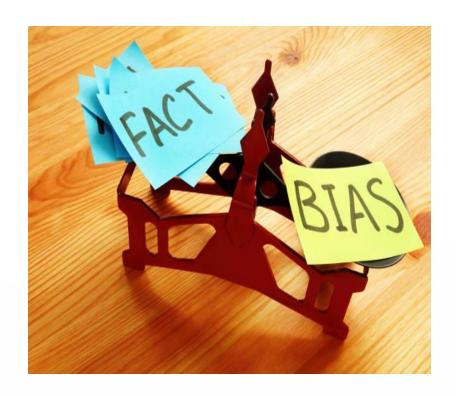
Victim Perspective

- Following the education/ training, victim -(X) of the incident was invited to discuss concerns independently.
- X was given time to discuss his thoughts and the impacts of the incident. X discussed their career journey and how early on his career he had faced some challenges and barriers due to his ethnicity. X had hoped in 2022 staff would be far more aware and less ignorant.
- X felt that education & training for this incident was a positive step and demonstrated to him that the incident had not only been taken seriously by the Trust but also by the staff involved



Unconscious Bias

- We can all be guilty of unconscious bias, despite thinking that we have carefully considered our thought process and believe ourselves to be fair thinkers.
- Some characteristics that could be used in labelling or stereotyping include: age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability.
- The beliefs can cause unfavourable treatment leading to unfair consequences.



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OUTCOMES

- Advice, guidance and training was provided by the Diversity and Inclusion Lead on Equality and Unconscious Bias
- A round table discussion by all parties, following investigation, resulted in an apology to the victim & further learning.
- Welfare completed for all parties
- Hub made a commitment to identify a diversity champion
- Lessons learned and good practice shared with <u>AACE as part of their Spotlight on Racism awareness campaign in 2022</u>.





CONCLUSION

WMAS have taken the decision to address unconscious bias head on, by introducing several processes which will highlight the learning and methods used to address such issues at the earliest opportunity, to ensure awareness of - and benefits to - their staff.

The case study has been produced based on a real example, which highlights unconscious bias in action and how the Trust dealt with it. This case study will be used in the following ways:

- It will become part of the Equality training programme for staff
- Learning will be cascaded to all Hub Senior Operating Managers and teams across the Ambulance Trust
- A briefing paper will be produced for HR managers highlighting the learning and methods used for addressing issues at the earliest opportunity possible so that there is wider staff benefit



For more information please contact your Diversity and Inclusion Lead: Mohammed Ramzan: Mohammed.ramzan@wmas.nhs.uk

