



West Midlands Ambulance Service

University NHS Foundation Trust



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 decision-making, impact team dynamics and leadership styles, and limit company diversity.
This, in turn, can reduce equal opportunities for team members and job applicants.

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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 these 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

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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.



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**

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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 [AACE as part of their Spotlight on Racism awareness campaign in 2022.](#)



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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:
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