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Black and ethnic minority network have ‘no confidence’ in Brighton hospital boss

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By : Frank le Duc

Black and ethnic minority staff said that they have “no confidence” in the chief executive of Brighton and Hove’s main hospital trust.



Marianne Griffiths

Their representatives – the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Network – shared their concerns in a letter to fellow staff after a race equality conference was organised without consultation.

They accused Royal Sussex County Hospital boss Marianne Griffiths, the chief executive of Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust, of presiding over worsening race relations.

They said that she had sacked senior black staff, failed to consult or engage and hadn’t even told them about the recently announced conference.

And they dismissed the event as “an attempt to protect the reputation of Ms Griffiths and her team without actually making any changes”.

Mrs Griffiths said: “This conference is an opportunity for the trust to move forward, building on the work already done and looking forward to the further improvements we will make together.

“We have issued an open invitation to colleagues across the trust so that we have as many voices and opinions in the room as possible.

“This will allow us to continue our journey as an open, equal and welcoming workplace in which everyone can excel for the benefit of our patients.”

In their letter, the BME Network said: “In recent years, a number of senior BME staff, who have spoken up regarding issues of patient safety and racism, have been dismissed by BSUH NHS Trust.

“Two senior black medical consultants have been dismissed under Ms Griffiths’s leadership.

“In June 2017 Ms Griffiths herself took the decision to dismiss the chair of the BME Network and associate director of transformation, Dr Vivienne Lyfar-Cissé.

“These cases are currently waiting to be heard by the Employment Tribunal.

“Since Dr Lyfar-Cissé’s dismissal, the BME Network for BSUH NHS Trust has been led by a core group of seven members.



Vivienne Lyfar-Cissé

“The core group has made every effort to engage with Ms Griffiths and her team but this has been made extremely difficult.”

“The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Network for Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals (BSUH) NHS Trust has become aware that the trust’s chief executive, Marianne Griffiths, has arranged for a Race Equality Conference to take place on (Tuesday) 29 May 2018.

“The BME Network has not been consulted on, or informed about, this event. It is the BME Network’s position that this is a divisive action and an abuse of power.

“The race issues at BSUH NHS Trust are long-standing and this has been acknowledged many times. In 2009, the then chief executive, Duncan Selbie, admitted that the trust was institutionally racist.

“In August 2016 the Care Quality Commission recommended that NHS Improvement should place BSUH NHS Trust into special measures, in part for its failure to deliver race equality. The trust remains in special measures to date.

“The BME Network for BSUH NHS Trust was launched in 2004 and in the years since has raised concerns both privately and publicly regarding the institutional racism that exists within the trust.

“The BME Network has worked with successive chief executives and their teams on various programmes to address race equality in the trust, to varying degrees of success.



Duncan Selbie

“It is the BME Network’s position that the greatest chance of success came from the Race Equality Workforce Engagement Strategy, whereby the leadership team and BME staff worked together in a top down, bottom up approach.

“This strategy was launched in 2014 but unfortunately fell into disarray amid what the CQC described as ‘a culture of disciplinary action and grievance, placing any progress at significant risk’”.

“Between 2004 and 2014, a number of Joint Race Equality Conferences were held. These were co-productions between the trust and the BME Network and the themes and agendas were agreed between the parties.

“The engagement strategy mentioned above was launched by the chair of the BME Network, Dr Vivienne Lyfar-Cissé, and the then chief executive, Matthew Kershaw, at the 2014 joint conference.

“In April 2017, as a result of being placed in special measures, NHS Improvement brought in Marianne Griffiths, chief executive of Western Sussex Hospitals (WSH) NHS Foundation Trust, and her leadership team, to lead BSUH NHS Trust.

“Since Ms Griffiths’ arrival, far from improving, the race issues at BSUH have become even worse.



Matthew Kershaw

“In recent years, a number of senior BME staff who have spoken up regarding issues of patient safety and racism have been dismissed by BSUH NHS Trust.

“Two senior black medical consultants have been dismissed under Ms Griffiths’s leadership.

“In June 2017, Ms Griffiths herself took the decision to dismiss the chair of the BME Network and associate director of transformation, Dr Vivienne Lyfar-Cissé. These cases are currently waiting to be heard by the Employment Tribunal.

“Since Dr Lyfar-Cissé’s dismissal, the BME Network for BSUH NHS Trust has been led by a core group of seven members. The core group has made every effort to engage with Ms Griffiths and her team but this has been made extremely difficult.

“Ms Griffiths does not accept that the trust is institutionally racist and has failed to acknowledge that the BME Network, as the beneficiaries of the race equality duty, should have input into any race equality initiatives.

“Before her dismissal, Dr Lyfar-Cissé had invited Ms Griffiths to meet the BME Network on several occasions. Ms Griffiths declined these invitations.

“Despite being in place for over a year, Ms Griffiths has done nothing meaningful to progress race equality.

“When the external company, People Opportunities, who were commissioned by the previous leadership team, presented a report on the culture of the organisation, which highlighted the racism in the trust and the views of BME staff, Ms Griffiths and her team attempted to hide the report from the BME Network and present a watered down version which did not even mention race equality.



“The report was only released when the BME Network submitted a complaint to the Information Commissioner’s Office.

“The BME Network has repeatedly requested that Ms Griffiths and her team reinstate the Engagement Strategy, but Ms Griffiths has refused to consider this idea and instead wants to create a new action plan with the help of the Workforce Race Equality Standard team from NHS England, led by Yvonne Coghill. This is despite the race issues that are prevalent at NHS England itself.

“Ms Griffiths and her team have made it very clear that they do not want the BME Network to exist unless it does exactly as it is told.

“For over ten years, the BME Network has held its meetings off-site, at venues in the city, in order to provide a safe environment for its members to discuss very difficult issues. These were paid from the BME Network’s budget.

“Ms Griffiths believes that meetings should be held on-site, to save money. However, she has now arranged her own Race Equality Conference, which will take place off-site at the Metropole Hotel, without the involvement of the BME Network.

“In summary, Ms Griffiths seeks to hold a Race Equality Conference, in order to waylay any criticism of the fact that in the past year, her only impact on the race issues at BSUH has been to make them worse, by dismissing senior BME colleagues and attempting to dismantle the BME Network.

“Ms Griffiths has not sought to engage, or even to inform, the BME Network regarding this conference. To hold a Race Equality Conference without the involvement of the beneficiaries is an abuse of power and an attempt to protect the reputation of Ms Griffiths and her team without actually making any changes.

“Ms Griffiths seeks to undermine and sideline the BME Network. The BME Network has no confidence in Ms Griffiths and her team to address the institutional racism that exists at BSUH NHS Trust.”