

UNDERSTANDING ALLYSHIP

An evidence synthesis of equality, diversity and inclusion within the NHS

Scoping current interventions, practices, and organisational processes

About

These headlines are drawn from a new comprehensive allyship report. Led by Zest Psychology and the University of Sussex, on behalf of NHS England, this new researched exploration into the art, science, and practice of allyship was conducted in two-phases and has revealed new insights and understanding.

These include the key enablers and inhibitors of allyship, the values and practices of allies, and what leaders and organisations can do to foster an allyship culture. The full report is held by NHS England's Workforce, Training, and Education Directorate.

Context

In the changing healthcare landscape, there is an increasing expectation for the NHS workforce to be compassionate and inclusive (see [Our NHS People Promise](#)), and for health and care to embrace equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as the 'personal responsibility of every leader and every member of staff' (see [Health and Social Care Review: Leadership for a Collaborative and Inclusive future](#)).

New insights are required to understand HOW to create the conditions for that shift. The research team set out to discover more about how allyship culture can play a crucial part.

Key findings

Allyship practice insights:

1. Values driven
2. Compassion-focused
3. Morally courageous
4. May be triggered by identity & connection
5. Extrinsic motivators play a part for some

Allyship is enabled by:

1. Organisations where allyship is encouraged & expected
2. Individual self-awareness & learning
3. Strong EDI leadership
4. Clear policies, processes, & practices
5. Recognition & endorsement

Allyship is inhibited by:

1. Fear of repercussions
2. Fake, complicit, or even toxic organisational cultures
3. Lack of skills/capabilities
4. Time and effort
5. Differences

The findings were more nuanced than expected and show individual motivations for allyship can widely differ.

The show must go on...

We noticed the poignant importance of the people behind allyship, much like the theatre...



THE DIRECTORS

Having the right people directing and influencing the allyship movement is critical. 'Allyship Activators', who invest their efforts in educating, fighting injustice and encouraging others.



THE SCRIPT

An in-depth understanding of equality, inclusion and allyship is important to ensure the script aligns with the vision. A good script will remove some inhibitors.



THE ACTORS

On stage are the many actors in allyship who, with the vision of the director, are nudged and influenced to educate themselves and advocate.



THE AUDIENCE

The audience are the recipients of allyship. Audience engagement will help ensure allyship does not become another means of keeping the privileged in power.



THE PROPS AND COSTUMES

The role of the Allyship Activator also infuses the work with signals and cues - the props and costumes to help the audience understand the role each actor is playing.



THE THEATRE

Given the introduction of Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), and the focus on systemic leadership, it would seem natural that the theatre is the ICS.



An ABC of Allyship

A

Allyship Activators:

Understand the practice of these newly identified catalysts, and focus on attracting, identifying, supporting, developing, and recognising them.



B

Board and system

accountability: System and board support is required to set the tone for an allyship culture, creating the conditions for Allyship Activators to thrive.



C

Compassionate allyship:

More understanding on how compassion might motivate, enable and sustain allyship practice is suggested. Must link with organisational values.

Intersectionality, multiple identities, and 'whole' allyship: Both privilege and marginalisation are multi-faceted. Several scripts and multiple actors need to develop a collective 'we' in the organisation.

Conclusion

For allyship to thrive, organisations must not only encourage it from staff, but also actively expect it. For this, allies and leaders must consider the report in its entirety, understand its new insights, and commit to its findings. The full report is held by NHS England's Workforce, Training, and Education Directorate.