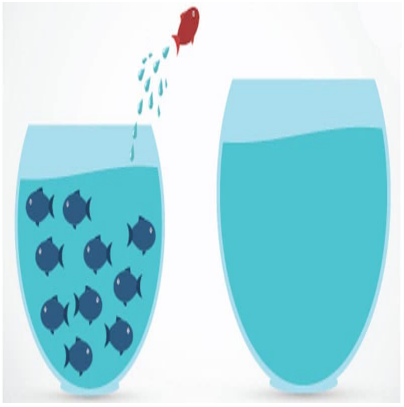

Description

Sparking Change

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Summary

Olivia Nicell reflects on her learning journey towards becoming an inclusive and sensitive team leader.

My experience

During midwifery training, I became acutely aware of the prejudice and injustice sometimes faced by lesbian and bisexual women using maternity services. As my career developed, I reflected on my feelings and perceptions, and realised that I had unconscious bias towards the treatment of women in same-sex relationships, as I could personally relate to their experiences. On realising this, I committed to broadening my perspective and better understanding the inequalities affecting other members of society. I have since trained to become an Equality and Diversity Champion and LGBTQ+ Advocate, sparking my passion for vocal and visible leadership. For me, leadership means being authentic, promoting inclusivity, and having compassion; leadership is found in the small, everyday choices we make.[1]

Demonstrating leadership

I strive to model behaviour that promotes diversity and fosters a culture of positive change. Good leaders inspire colleagues to work towards a collective goal. Training courses and up- to-date publications provide vital information. However, I believe that lived experiences produce extremely powerful and impactful evidence, particularly when it comes to issues surrounding culture and diversity. Deference to expertise is so beneficial, but should be requested respectfully; the emotional labour required to educate others about inequity one faces should not be underestimated.

I learnt so much from the first trans and non-binary parents that I cared for. They informed me that even our computer systems create barriers for them as birthing people. For example, our software would not allow admission of an antenatal patient unless their gender was “female”, an important error which is now updated, following escalation to management and rectification by our admin and IT team.

What next?

As practitioners, we respond to each person's unique health and social situation.[2] In order to challenge cultural norms and promote leadership, student midwives can advocate, educate, reflect, challenge behaviour, and avoid assumptions. Consider how accessible, inclusive and representative of local communities your resources are.[3] Does someone in your care have issues with literacy? Do they need visual aids? Do they have digital access? Is there a language barrier?

To be inclusive of LGBTQ+ parent/carers, ask open questions about family structure and routes to parenthood sensitively.[4] Ensure that records have the correct name, sex and pronouns to demonstrate respect for identity. Terminology like "biological parent" can enable parents to address necessary medical questions, but you can simply ask parents what terminology you should use. Always be aware some parents may not appear physically as you might presume them to.[4,5]

Conclusion

Remember, if you make a mistake which leads to misunderstanding, apologise, take responsibility, and use the experience to welcome new perspectives. Use your voice to strive for equality and equity for all service users. **TSM**

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