

Scenario 3 – the mental health support worker - transcript

My name's Monique and I'm a mental health support worker at a low security inpatient unit.

I used to absolutely love my job. I love to help people. I love to support my patients.

But nowadays, I don't feel like I can do that. I don't feel like I can give them the service and the care that they need.

Lots of reasons to why that is but one of them is we just don't have enough staff anymore.

You know, we're so short staffed that I don't have the time to give the patients the care that they need.

I don't have the time to really listen and sit with them and understand them.

Whereas I used to before and we do have a lot of agency workers and bank workers coming in and coming out.

You know, on one hand, yes, it's good because we are getting more physical bodies there, helping us on the ward, but on the other hand, because they're so temporary, they don't know how the ward works, they don't know what we do, they don't know how we do things so it doesn't feel like you have, even if you have a lot of people, it doesn't feel like it at times.

So, it's just, it's really difficult and don't get me started on the policies. So, there's so many policies and I feel like I'm always in between a rock and a hard place because on one hand, I'm being expected to enforce the policies that are set by the higher ups who obviously you haven't asked us on the ground what the patients need, what the patients want.

And the patients who, so we've got to then enforce the rules, but they don't want to know.

So, one time we were in the corridor and so one of the rules is that patients aren't allowed to smoke.

So, what they can do is they can vape, but they can't vape in the communal areas, they can only vape in their rooms.



So, one patient was vaping in the corridor, and I said to them, you know, please go back to your rooms, please vape there.

They didn't like it, they feel like they're already boxed in, and they didn't want to be confined to their room.

So, I get it, I do understand their reasoning behind it, but from my position, I have to enforce the rules, because if not, I'd be told off.

So, when I said to them to go back to their room to vape, then they kicked off.

They were giving me racial slurs, they were shouting abuse. One of the agency staff members came in to try and help and they ended up getting physically attacked.

There goes another staff member, then she was off sick, so then we're in the same cycle again.

We then didn't have enough staff and when I then spoke to the managers and nurses about it, I get, the nurses, they're busy, they don't always see what's going on, they're busy doing paperwork in the office, but when I try and speak to them and say that these things are happening and people are saying racial slurs, they don't want to know.

They have these feedback meetings, but they always happen when I'm on the ward.

So, whenever I try and voice my opinion, they don't want to know. And also, colleagues as well.

These policies cause a rift between us colleagues, because then my colleagues said that I should have turned a blind eye and then none of that would have happened.

But nobody asked me if I was okay. Nobody even asked the agency worker if they were okay.

It's difficult. It's a hard position to be in and it makes me feel sad, angry.

I feel a mix of emotions all the time. I started this job when I got into this area of work to help people, and that element has been lost on so many levels because of so many reasons.

But one thing that I am finding really difficult is going into workday after day after day to hear the voices. The verbal abuse, often racial slurs and that nobody wants to do anything about it.



It's there because the patients are poorly, it's considered that, you know, they don't know what they're talking about.

They don't necessarily mean it in a nasty way. So, it's okay. But then I'm bringing this home with me and I can't emotionally then be there for my children because I'm thinking about work.

They want to play with me, and I just, I don't have the head space to do it because I'm thinking, do I go into work tomorrow or do I stay at home?

It's just not how it used to be. It's not the same job it used to be at all.