

National Ambulance  
BME Forum



International Women's Day

# Celebrating our BME Women #EachForEqual

Working to improve the  
experience of Black and Minority  
Ethnic Staff and communities

Asmina Islam Chowdhury and  
Sharifa Hashem  
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# Introduction



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**International Women's Day (IWD) 2020 will be celebrated around the globe Sunday 8th March.**

Two words in that title struck me – International and women. This day is for all women and that's why I'm really proud to share this short pack of stories introducing you to some of the voices of inspirational women in our ambulance service, specifically our BME women. I've loved meeting many of them over the last few years. I just wish I could have shared more.

I've been in the ambulance service for 15 and a half years now. I've been quite fortunate, and have had some fantastic female role models who have supported me and my development both from within and external to my Trust. I've also had some wonderful male allies too, but it wasn't until joining this network that I realised leadership wasn't just about other women,

it was for women who looked like me too. Put simply, representation matters.

**The first IWD occurred in 1911 and was supported by over one million people. Today, with an NHS Workforce that is not far off 80% women, our female workforce is more than that number alone.**

This year's IWD theme is #EachForEqual. An equal world is an enabled world. Gender equality is not a women's issue.

Asmina Islam Chowdhury is a committee member of the National Ambulance BME Forum, and Inclusion Manager at South East Coast Ambulance





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# Meet Sharifa...



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My name is Sharifa Hashem and my history has some complex issues, although my day to day life is recognisable to many. I work in an office based job, live with my partner; we have two pet dogs and enjoy travelling. The complexity behind that is that I was born Muslim, I am gay, my partner is female and I am Arab British living in Devon.

I was born in Bahrain and grew up there until the age of 11 in the midst of civil unrest and uprisings in the country. We arrived in the UK in the winter of 1996 to unfamiliar surroundings and a school system that I wasn't able to participate in without the necessary language skills. As a child who is a political refugee I soon realised that my 'otherness' was both visible and challenging to those around me.

I realised in order for me to achieve my potential I would need to better my language skills, I learnt through reading. I started reading books with one word and a picture, progressing to books with simple sentences, onto books with paragraphs and a year from that I was in real danger of having read every book in the school library!

***“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives”***

***Audrey Lorde***

My history meant that I was interested in people and the way the world around them impacted their lives. I completed a BSc in Psychology, followed by an MA in Gender and Identity in the Middle East (Exon) and an MPhil in Social Policy.





International  
Women's Day

# Celebrating #IWD2020



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BME Forum

I worked as a support worker for young adults in social care settings and I started a human rights group which travelled to places like The United Nations and US State Department. Eventually starting my current job where I am the Patient Engagement Manager for South Western Ambulance Service, leading on the delivery of over 300 events a year including pride events and cultural celebrations.

***I know first-hand how it feels to be 'othered' and voiceless.***

I also know how it feels to overcome obstacles and feel supported. My journey to get here was supported by countless helping hands, from my school librarian who always knew which book to suggest, to my teachers who read my university application, to my colleagues who read my job statements and those who mentored and supported me.

***My visibility is not a choice;  
it is part of what makes me who I am.***



Sharifa Hashem is a committee member of the National Ambulance BME Forum, and Patient Engagement Manager at South West Ambulance Service

I often say “I wonder which part of me someone will choose to discriminate on me with on today, be it my disability, my skin colour, my gender, my religion or my sexual orientation.” And whilst I may have wished to be less visible growing up, I now realise my visibility may allow others to see opportunities that they had not considered before. Visibility matters, equality matters, your voice matters so make it heard.





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# Meet Agatha.....



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I'm Agatha, a practising GP in South London and Assistant Medical Director at London Ambulance Service (LAS) where I leads on integrated urgent care.

I also chair the LAS BME forum and am the clinical lead for Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES). Having completed the WRES expert programme as part of cohort one, I'm care deeply about using this experience to champion the BME agenda within the LAS, and really making a difference to BME staff experience and opportunities in the NHS.

I have a strong interest in leadership and teaching, and passionate about supporting others to develop confidence and their own leadership skills. From my own experience, I'm very much aware of the inequalities facing people from BME backgrounds in terms of career progression.



Agatha Nortley-Meshe Is a committee member of the National Ambulance BME Forum, and Assistant Medical Director at London Ambulance Service.

***Although society has come a long way, people from BME backgrounds still have to work that bit harder to move up the career ladder; you can't be average, you have to excel and she is keen to support others to do just that.***







International  
Women's Day

# Celebrating #IWD2020



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BME Forum

It's a case of putting yourself out there, constantly developing your skills and making the connections you need in order to move forward.

I also believes in the importance of role models from BME backgrounds. Where people can see someone who looks like them in a senior position it reinforces the idea that they can achieve their own aspirations.



**As leaders from BME backgrounds, we have to be visible, approachable, provide support and open doors for others to develop and excel.**

I'm also a trained mentor, and over the years have provided informal coaching and mentoring to support personal and career development for a number of healthcare colleagues. Alongside this, I've been providing mentoring to women from several different countries via the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women since 2011.

To mark International Women's Day this year, I'll be speaking at the InspireUrBiz International Women's Day Conference in Antigua.





International  
Women's Day

## Meet Pam ...



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I arrived in the UK when I was five and arrived in Gravesend which had I understood the meaning I would have thought I really had arrived at death's door (apologies to any residents of Gravesend!). It was grey, cold and unfriendly- a million miles from the warm weather and people of Kenya where I was born.

By the time I was ten I was already keenly aware of racism having had an entire street sign a petition to try and get rid of my family and having my head stuck down a public toilet by two bullies demanding I call my dad a 'P\*\*\*'.

**I refused then and I refuse now to change who I am to accommodate others perception of me or my Indian heritage.**

I was very lucky to have a father who saw no limits to life and not only lived in four different countries but encouraged me to believe I could overcome and succeed obstacles.

More importantly it was not just a belief inculcated in me but accompanied with kit box of tools that would help me to survive and thrive.

I was fortunate enough to go to university with a grant and no university fees at a time when only 1% of the population had the luxury of a university education. Having completed my first degree in American History, Literature and Politics I was burning with rage at the inequalities and torture inflicted on African Americans but inspired by the Civil Rights Movement; writers like James Baldwin and the bravery of black men and women in their ordinary and extraordinary lives.





International  
Women's Day

# Celebrating #IWD2020



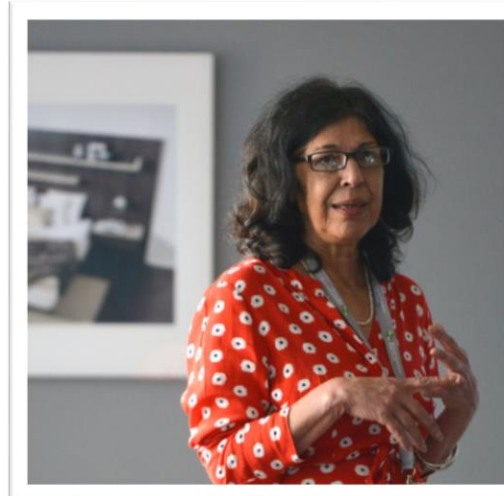
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I went on to look at the criminal justice system in both the USA and Britain and again found the inequalities in how justice is meted out to people of colour and to women. I decided to do a Masters degree in Criminology and went on to work for seven years in Category A prisons and a short stint in Sing- Sing penitentiary.

***After this fascinating period of my life, I knew I would always work towards trying to contribute to a fairer world for all people.***

That opportunity really opened up with the help of Herman Ouseley (now Lord Ouseley) when he took a chance on me at the Greater London Council. He inspired me as a leader and as a black man who had also refused to be held back. He taught me compassion and alternative ways to get my voice heard.

There have been many others along the way that have helped me and in turn I hope I have helped others. My lesson in life is that not only do we as human beings have a right to life but to live the best life we can and enable others do the same.



Pam Brown Is a committee member of the National Ambulance BME Forum, and Head of Diversity and Inclusion at West Midlands Ambulance Service







International  
Women's Day

# This is Aneela....



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I started with the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service in August 1997, coming from a legal secretarial background I had no idea that there actually was a emergency operations or Comms and what happened within it.

Once I had taken up the opportunity to come and listen to some calls I was hooked. AMPDS was a new thing at that time and I was amazed that just over the phone so much could be done to support a caller anywhere in the west Yorkshire region. I wanted to do THAT, I wanted to help people and this is how my ambulance journey began.

For a many years I was the only Asian / BME staff member in ambulance control, which was shocking and surprising for a service of the size it was. So, being a qualified legal interpreter I used my skills to enhance the care and help provided to patients and callers.

***I became a vital part of a team and part of the Comms, family very quickly.***

Over the years, its been a steep learning curve dealing with people on some of the best and worst days of their lives.

I deal with a variety of calls every shift from births, deaths, illness, mental ill health, suicides, and everything in between. Some calls have been and are extremely challenging, but our role is to do our best to help where its possible to do so in the safest way.

The callers themselves vary from the calm, patient, kind and polite to racist, abusive and nasty. I deal with all callers with a smile on my face, compassion, patience and provide the best care I can.





International  
Women's Day

# Celebrating #IWD2020



National Ambulance  
BME Forum

In 2019 I won UK IAEMD Dispatcher of the year , for this I am extremely proud , not just for me but that the accolade has been bought back to Yorkshire, an award that signifies that my hard work as an EMD, as a person and a role model.

My job has made me more patient, it's taught me to HEAR and not just LISTEN. It's taught me that you can only do your very best and sometimes your very best isn't enough.

The photograph attached is me in my uniform A uniform I take great pride in wearing, it symbolises my belonging to a family – our Green family.

***Finally, I'd like to add that not all hero's wear capes, some of us wear headsets.***

Aneela Ahmed I  
Emergency Medical  
Dispatcher, Yorkshire  
Ambulance Service





International Women's Day

# Our #IWD icons

We asked our committee members for their role models and icons and here's what they told us.



“My IWD role model is Oprah Winfrey. She's a self-made woman with gusto and presence and has a profound impact on so many people.”

Tasnim Ali, Chair National Ambulance BME Forum and Business Manager, YAS



“For IWD I want to celebrate Emma De-Carteret, Head of Governance at East of England Ambulance Service. Emma is the one who recruited me to my current role, and is a great role model for staff and a true leader. Working with Emma, you know where you stand. She will always have your back while also giving you ample opportunities to grow.”

Ajay Kumar, Health and Safety Officer, EEAST



Michelle Obama! For me, as successful as she is, she has remained rooted in her humble beginnings. She went from living in a low income household to being one of the most powerful and inspirational women in the world. What wins her my vote is her tireless efforts in improving healthcare and education especially for young women.

Oliver Evans, Student Paramedic NEAS



Mary Seacole... a Jamaican born lady who helped wounded soldiers in the Crimean war. She went right near to the battlefield and gave medical assistance. Unfortunately her legacy was not widely celebrated until recent times. She is my hero as I believe that she did her work not to be seen or celebrated, but that she cared.

Simon Linton, Paramedic SCAS



# Health & Care Women Leaders Network



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Whilst we're here we also wanted to give a shout out to the wonderful work being done by The Health & Care Women Leaders Network. This network is an initiative delivered by NHS Confederation and NHS Employers.

The network exists to:

- support women in their careers and their professional development
- recognise the skills and talents of women and their impact across health and care
- raise awareness of barriers facing women in the workplace

Their #WonderfulWomenDo campaign encourages, supports and celebrates women working in health and care. It beautifully highlights how women can, and already do, lift up and support those around them, and aims to break down the barriers to true equality and inclusivity in the workplace.

So for IWD2020, why not join this campaign, and celebrate the women who have supported you by using #WonderfulWomenDo. To find out more about the network visit

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/engagement-and-networks/health-and-care-women-leaders-network>

