

Compassionate care for Older People

Everybody connected to health and social care understands the importance of compassion - it is at the heart of everything we do and the reason we choose our career paths. The value of simple gestures like the touch of a hand, words of reassurance or a smile can make all the difference to a patient's experience. It is crucial that we never lose sight of these elements of compassion when caring for elderly patients. This week, the Centre of Excellence in Safety for Older People (CESOP) hosted a seminar which put this under the spotlight. As we embrace the ever developing world of medicine and celebrate our aging population, we must also strive to deliver the highest quality of health care with compassion at its heart. Guest speakers, including Sir Keith Pearson, Chairman of Health Education England, were invited to bring into conversation ways to achieve outstanding care and discuss how we can ensure our parents and grandparents continue to be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, as they get older.

Each speaker shared the vision of influencing culture and behaviour across health and social care with the view of improving patient safety and experience.

They called for compassionate care to be the priority of all members of staff throughout all health and social care organisations. This sparked up discussion on positive leadership and management which is absolutely necessary when nurturing the health care professionals of the future. Everyone agreed that it was important that all staff in the health and care sector are 'people people' and it was suggested we 'recruit for values and train for skill'.

Dr Arturo Vilches-Moraga, Consultant Geriatrician at Salford Royal NHS Trust talked about the importance of fitting care to the patient, not making the patient fit the model of care that is routinely given. There are large numbers of elderly patients, but they are all very different, all individuals.

Sir Keith Pearson concluded the session with a reminder of the contribution our older population offer. They are our friends, carers for our children, and support for our families. They should be respected for their significant contribution to society, for their former professions, and should never become just 'Jack in the corner with dementia'. He focused on treating the people behind the mask of illness as humans and individuals.

His presentation had a salient message about the care of the elderly: 'We're not just adding years onto life but life into years. Medicine and healthier lifestyles has meant we can live for longer. We have a duty to help the elderly maximise on the time they have left – and remember, much of what we do in the NHS is for older people – they are the biggest consumer of our services, if we get it right for them, we get it right for everyone'