

How RCN Connect made real change

Rudi Page helped set up RCN Connect two decades ago. Here, he reflects on its legacy

Back in 2000, the Royal College of Nursing took action to support its black and minority ethnic (BME) members. RCN Connect aimed to develop networks and tools to improve cultural understanding in workplaces and challenge barriers BME members were experiencing. Over the three years it existed, Connect boosted the number of BME leaders and activists at the RCN through “communities of practice” – networks that reached out to BME nursing staff.

Key to RCN Connect’s success was the determination of institutional leadership to reduce discrimination and improve BME representation, both at the RCN and within NHS trusts and related bodies. From the RCN, Christine Hancock, Tom Bolger, Ann Leedham-Smith, Roswyn Hakesley-Brown, Sylvia Denton, Linda Bailey, Tom Sandford, Geraldine Cunningham and Jennifer Pearson played huge roles.

RCN Connect helped BME members take part in debates, forums and seminars. Pearson led EDNA, the first network supported by the RCN, which helped to increase BME membership involvement in Congress.

New models of leadership and management promoted the idea that “all voices must be heard” and used data to hold executives accountable. Connect also got the RCN involved

in the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue, and embraced a wide range of equality issues.

The past 20 years has taught us that we still need to pursue inclusion, fairness, wellbeing and psychological safety to maintain staff and public trust in local systems.

Wendy Irwin, Equalities Lead at the RCN has seen the developing legacy of Connect: “The past two decades have seen further developments such as diversity champions, who distribute leadership of equality issues and build on the importance of allyship. The RCN has also embedded critical race theory for cultural ambassadors, which has the potential to make a profound difference to the experiences of BME members.

“Confronting racism in nursing is a marathon and not a sprint. The RCN commits to tackling these issues wherever they emerge.” ■

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