

Humans of Medicine



Now I know that I don't have to put up with that kind of behaviour. Racism is not acceptable

ANONYMOUS

As an intern I did a rotation in orthopaedics. I wasn't sure what to expect but loved the term. The registrars and consultants were fantastic, there was a great teaching environment and we worked so well as a team. I have never been surgically inclined but I can see why people love orthopaedics.

But a few weeks before the end of the term we had one patient who just made me feel awful. He was hostile, angry and rude. I really tried to empathise, trying to understand that this patient had a chronic disease, and that anyone would be as angry and upset if they were in as much pain as him. But I really dreaded morning ward rounds and I hated going to work. He would berate me when his surgery was cancelled to facilitate other emergencies. He complained when he had to fast before surgery. He would complain of my incompetence

Once I was asked to insert an intravenous cannula and the patient flat out refused for me to approach. I asked a colleague, who happened to also be the same race and gender and he was similarly hostile. I then asked our Caucasian male colleague to see him, warning him that the patient had been hostile towards us. But to this colleague, this patient was so polite and kind.

This really made me frustrated and just downright dejected. This patient was taking up so much of my mental strength and time. I had been made to think I was inadequate, but it was in fact probably at least somewhat related to the colour of my skin.

I was relieved to finish that term, not because of anything else other than not having to see that patient again. My orthopaedic registrars informed me that the patient was extremely pleasant and polite to the new resident who was luckily, Caucasian.

I write about this four year on as one of the most frustrating and upsetting times in my career. I was lucky that this experience was to the end of my term, otherwise, I am not sure how I would have dealt with the situation if it were prolonged. Now I know better. Now I know that I don't have to put up with that kind of behaviour. Now I have the experience and courage to tell people straight up that racism is not acceptable, that I can feel safe and discuss these issues with my seniors, and that I can talk to my colleagues for support.