

BME trailblazers in the NHS

Barbara Burford

Equality, diversity & human rights:
BME trailblazer series

*Celebrating the 65th
anniversary of the NHS*



On 5 July 2013, the NHS will celebrate its 65th birthday. The NHS is the single largest employer of black and minority ethnic (BME) people in England and has been heavily dependent upon the services of professionals from all parts of the globe since its inception.

In the run up to this significant event, the NHS Employers organisation is profiling a number of leading BME individuals, all of whom are trailblazers – pioneers, leaders and experts in their respective fields of healthcare. Together, they have blazed a trail, inspiring future generations, and helped to shape and influence developments in clinical and management practice during the last 65 years. We hope you will join us in saluting the achievements of these exceptional individuals.

Barbara Burford 1944–2010

Barbara Burford was a lifelong champion of equality and diversity in the health service and has directly inspired hundreds of health professionals and managers through her work. Throughout her career, Barbara worked closely with the NHS, government departments, minority groups and public sector organisations to raise the profile of equality and diversity in the NHS. She was presented with an honorary doctorate in 2001 from Middlesex University in North London, in recognition of her national achievements in the equality and diversity field.

Barbara became the first deputy director of the University of Bradford's Centre for Inclusion and Diversity just after her retirement in 2005. She contributed to the development of the Centre within the university as a centre for world-class expertise in applied research on inclusion and diversity. The Centre is internationally renowned and has received numerous funding including recent European Commission funding for a multi-million Euro project on transforming organisational culture for gender equality in research and innovation in higher education institutions in Europe.

It was as director of equality and diversity at the Department of Health, from 1999 to 2002, that Barbara was able to raise the national profile of her field. She spearheaded a number of initiatives including the development of the Positively Diverse Programme and Field Book – the first practical guide to managing equality and diversity in the NHS. She also set up the Job Shop – an in-house employment agency that has

“Barbara was a friend, colleague and mentor. She was personally committed to supporting the work of equality and diversity at the University of Bradford. She loved the work that she did and challenged, encouraged and supported anyone she worked with. I am undoubtedly a smarter, wiser, more accomplished and just overall a better professional and person for having known her.”

**Professor Uduak Archibong,
Professor of Diversity and Director, Centre for
Inclusion and Diversity, University of Bradford**



Did you know?

1. Barbara's play, *Patterns*, was produced at Drill Hall Theatre in 1984.
2. One of Barbara's many achievements was convincing those in positions of power that equality and diversity are an important part of the infrastructure of the NHS.

been taken on and used by many NHS trusts. She played a key role in setting up Bradford's healthcare apprenticeship scheme, which has changed the demography of the health sector workforce in Bradford.

After this, from 2002 until 2005, Barbara worked as the director of diversity at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). She led the development of equality schemes including Race to Improve, which involved consulting older people from ethnic minorities. Her work on this scheme resulted in a suite of touch screen information points being fitted in various languages. The wheels that she set in motion are still running to improve equality in the DWP.

Born on 9 December 1944 in Jamaica, Barbara moved to North London at the age of ten with her sister and parents. She attended the Dalston County Grammar School and went on to study biomedical sciences at London University. While living in London, Barbara was active in feminist politics and wrote poetry, short stories, plays and a novella.

Barbara joined the NHS in 1964, specialising in

electron microscopy. In 1980 she led a team at the Pulmonary Vascular Laboratory at the Institute of Child Health and Great Ormond Street Hospital. Here she worked alongside Sheila Haworth and her team, achieving medical breakthroughs in heart and lung transplant surgery for young children and infants.

In 1990 Barbara moved to Leeds, where she set up IT systems for NHS Executives. One of her key achievements was designing a programme of guidelines to help achieve equality in the NHS. The accompanying manual is still being used by organisations across the country.

Alongside her later work at the Centre for Inclusion and Diversity, Barbara set up her own consultancy, Barbara Burford Consulting, so that she could continue her much-loved work as a mentor and coach. Her work included creating some important guides for the Department of Health on disability, gender and religion and developed the equality and diversity strategy for NHS North West.

Barbara passed away aged 65 on 20 February 2010 and is survived by her daughter, Sarah, and her civil partner, Joy Howard. Barbara was dedicated to the work she loved and has left the legacy of her efforts behind for others to continue to develop.

The University of Bradford has set up an annual lecture in Barbara's memory, marking her life and work. The Barbara Burford Annual Memorial Lecture is an integral part of the international annual conference, Making Diversity Interventions Count. It is delivered each year by one of Barbara's colleagues in equality and diversity who had a direct link with her and her work.