

# a Day in the life

Sarah Wright thinks about the stigma of mental illness on the wards



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Recently I heard the sister talking to one of the nurses about a patient – ‘they’re bonkers apparently, and the police don’t want to stay now they’re admitted!’ The response? ‘Oh, great! That’s all I need – another nutcase!’ I was sat at the desk chasing results before I went home and was unable to ignore this conversation. I remember thinking that I’d meet this patient the next day and wondering what they meant. Over the next couple of days it was clear that the patient had mental health problems and needed specialist support.



It made me consider what my response should have been. What would Jesus’ have been?

Sadly, I overheard many derogatory comments and gossip among the staff. Despite trying to remain impartial, I failed to challenge the stigma and prejudice against mental illness that I was seeing. Yes, the patient had a psychiatric illness, but they were still a person needing care. Did they really deserve to have the staff gossiping and complaining about them? It made me consider what my response should have been. What would Jesus’ have been? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks about loving our enemies and treating others how we would like to be treated.<sup>1</sup>

Paul tells us to ‘not let any unwholesome talk come out of [our] mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up’<sup>2</sup> and ‘to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always be gentle toward everyone’.<sup>3</sup> We are also told that every human is made in the image of God and are therefore precious (not just people like us).<sup>4</sup> As Christians we should guard our tongues and not speak words that are harmful, not only to the person we are speaking about but also harmful to ourselves. We are not called to be involved in gossip or judge people based on their health or

lifestyle, but to ‘act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’<sup>5</sup> and ‘love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples’.<sup>6</sup> I can’t help but think that I should have spoken up for that patient who couldn’t stand up for themselves. Jesus wouldn’t have stayed silent listening to those hurtful comments, he would have spoken up and demonstrated his love to that patient by showing a better way to act. Why shouldn’t we follow his example? ■

## REFERENCES

1. Luke 6:27-36
2. Ephesians 4:29
3. Titus 3:2
4. Genesis 1:27
5. Micah 6:8
6. John 13:34-35