

The Shuri Network: Why Black Panther could improve patient safety

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‘It is in our hands to create a better world for all who live in it’

Nelson Mandela

Reshaping the NHS through digital technology and innovation has shot to the top of the government’s priority list, with remote consultations, the NHS Test and Trace App and artificial intelligence (AI) in the headlines almost daily.

However, although 77% of the NHS workforce is female, and just under 20% nationally (around 44% in London) is of Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) origin, there are fewer than ten women of colour in senior (chief information officer [CIO] or chief clinical information officer [CCIO]) roles in NHS trusts and arm’s-length bodies.

We know that the experience of BAME staff is a good barometer for patient satisfaction¹ and that where the organisational leadership better represents the ethnicity of staff, there is more trust, stronger perceptions of fairness and overall better morale of staff and higher levels of engagement.² Inclusive teams where staff are engaged and valued simply provide better care. The NHS People Plan³ and Public Health England’s recent report on the impact of COVID-19 in BAME groups⁴ make it clear that increasing diversity in leadership and decision-making is not just the right thing to do – it is a moral and political imperative.

The Shuri Network – named after the Black Panther film character who is responsible for her country’s success – was launched in 2019 for women of colour interested or involved in digital health and technology. Founded by two former CCIOs, Shera Chok, a GP, and Sarah Amani, a nurse, we champion diversity, innovation and safety, support BAME women to gain the skills and confidence to progress into digital leadership positions and challenge the NHS to do better on diversity and inclusion, reduce discrimination and increase BAME representation at senior levels. The Network is supported by NHS England, NHSX and Health Education England.

Since our launch a little over a year ago, we have gained a national profile in health tech and grown to over 700 members and allies. We have increased the visibility of BAME women and provided a national platform to share our contribution to digital transformation, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, and changed the perception of what a digital leader looks and sounds like. We have support from national leaders including Sonia Patel (CIO, NHSX), Prerana Issar (chief people officer, NHS England) and Matthew Gould (chief executive, NHSX). The ripple effect has inspired others to take action, including Project Desi, a social enterprise to help tackle digital exclusion within the BAME community.

Shuri Network initiatives



- > Spoken at over 25 national and international events including the NHS Expo, Digital Health Summer Schools and the HSJ Digital Leadership Summit to champion diversity, highlight successful BAME role models and inspire women
- > Offered bursaries for professional development
- > Provided advice to the secretary of state for health, Matt Hancock, and NHSX on the COVID-19 response, AI and digital inclusion
- > Developed practical resources, such as recruitment guides for organisations
- > Worked with organisations such as Coders of Colour to attract young people to work in the NHS and recruited a Shuri Student Ambassador build our student membership

The rapid pace of digital transformation we have seen during the COVID-19 crisis is likely to be sustained. All digital leaders need to actively develop a digitally inclusive environment where diverse talents and views are valued and used to transform how we care for patients and reduce health inequalities.

What can you do to support the initiative? Join the network as an ally via www.shurinetwork.com; follow @NetworkShuri; challenge your Board to do better on diversity; create opportunities within your trust for more junior staff, particularly those from under-represented groups, to share their aspirations and ideas for digital innovation; and offer shadowing attachments and secondments. Finally, if you haven’t seen it already, watch Black Panther.

References

- 1 Coghill Y, Naqvi H, Holton K. *Links between NHS staff experience and patient satisfaction*. NHS England, 2018. www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/01-018-edc03a-staff-exp-patient-satisfaction.pdf.
- 2 Kline R. Diversity and inclusion are not optional extras if the NHS wishes to improve. *Health Service J*, 17 October 2018. www.hsj.co.uk/comment/diversity-and-inclusion-are-not-optional-extras-if-the-nhs-wishes-to-improve/7023599.article.
- 3 NHS England. *We are the NHS: People Plan for 2020/2021 – Action for us all*. www.england.nhs.uk/ournhspeople/
- 4 Public Health England. *COVID-19: understanding the impact on BAME communities*. www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-understanding-the-impact-on-bame-communities