



Press Release

Immediate Release

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### **Colchester Nurse Shares Story as Part of Mental Health Nurses Day**

A nurse from Colchester has explained the benefits of a career supporting others during their darkest days as part of Mental Health Nurses Day.

Sarah Bidwell is a Clinical Team Leader at Cygnnet Hospital Colchester, a 54 bed service providing a range of intensive support and rehabilitation services for men with learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders or mental health needs.

She has shared her career journey to mark Mental Health Nurses Day (Weds 21 February), which was created by a group of mental health nurses from across the UK to help people celebrate the work of this group of healthcare professionals.

Describing her daily routine, she said no two days are ever the same.

"I always attend to duty with an open mind and ready to think outside the box," she explained. "There are of course regular daily nursing duties to undertake and routines to support our individuals to achieve, however learning disability nurses are part of a multi-disciplinary team, so I work closely with a number of professions including Psychiatrists, Speciality Doctors, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language therapists. I also liaise with GPs, families, commissioners and social workers.

"At the start of the shift, I will initially check on the individuals in our care and then receive a handover which includes the individual's current risks and care plans. Part of my nursing responsibilities is to administer medication and attend ward rounds.

Throughout the day, I will be on the 'shop floor' and provide 1:1 key sessions for the individuals within our care. There may be occasions where the individuals in our care can present with complex behaviours and I am responsible for ensuring the safety of these individuals and staff."

On how she became a nurse, Sarah said she initially started a Business Studies Course at University but quickly learnt that this was not the right direction for her. She left university and started working in an elderly home as a support worker. During this time she found an interest in supporting patients who were finding it difficult to communicate verbally. This led her to enrol at Anglia Ruskin University and she completed her Learning Disability Nurse training between 2000 – 2003.

During her final management module at university, she volunteered as a student nurse to go to a hospital in Croatia for a month to support individuals with learning disabilities.

"This was a huge eye opener to see the difference in how another country provided care with extreme limited resources," she said. "Having this opportunity so early on in my career changed my perspective in the care I deliver to individuals with a learning disability and encouraged my research and access the available resources within this country."

Sarah said she wanted to become a Learning Disability Nurse to give a voice to those people in our society who are easily overlooked just because they understand the world in a different way. She wants to help others understand and to uphold the rights of people with learning disabilities and their families.

"The best part of my job is coming into work to see the individuals that I care for and supporting them to have a 'good' day or a 'great' day," she explained.

"The word "challenging" gets used a lot in learning disability nursing. People we support may present with what may be considered "challenging behaviours". Although these challenges can sometimes be seen as uncomfortable, they are often challenges we want to accept as they provide the opportunity for incredible achievements. Challenging behaviour provides an opportunity to grow a deeper understanding about how people communicate and express their needs.

"Helping individuals in our care to find alternative and more positive ways in which to express themselves whether this is verbal or non-verbal can take time but to support an individual through their care pathway from admission through to discharge is in incredible part of being a Learning Disability Nurse."

On why people should consider a career in mental health nursing, Sarah said: "Being a Learning disability Nurse is unique and a specialist role. I believe it to be a position of trust that gives a family the confidence to delegate the care of their loved one to someone else who will understand the unique needs of their loved one and their family as a whole.

"I believe strongly that the fact that a person cannot understand or express their needs in the usual fashion does not diminish their opinion. I want to support and encourage them to make their own choices and help others learn to make adjustments to accommodate their needs. To become a Learning disability nurse involves empathy, sensitivity and compassion when working with individuals and their families. It often requires flexibility, patience and creativity in difficult circumstances because positive results may take a long time to achieve.

"If you are assertive, self-aware, have good communication skills and have the ability to advocate for people with learning disabilities I would strongly recommend considering a career as a Learning Disability Nurse to support the individuals in our society who are overlooked to achieve their potential."

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**Notes to Editors:**

For more information, please contact Gemma Attew, External Communications Manager, on [gemmaattew@cygnethealth.co.uk](mailto:gemmaattew@cygnethealth.co.uk) or 07718 244811.