



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Harrow mental health nurse recognised with Professional Award

A mental health nurse whose work has helped transform care for people with some of the most complex needs has received national recognition for her impact on patients and colleagues.

Stephanie Lael, Clinical Team Leader on Springs Unit at Cygnnet Hospital Harrow, has been named a recipient of a Professional Award at the 2026 Mental Health Awards.

She was nominated by Ward Manager Maryanne Mathews in recognition of her contribution to developing specialist care at the London Road hospital.

Stephanie has played a central role in developing the hospital's Enhanced Package of Care (EPC) service, supporting individuals with highly complex needs, including people who have experienced long-term segregation.

She said receiving the award was particularly meaningful because much of the most important work in mental health nursing happens away from public view.

Stephanie said: "So much of mental health nursing happens in moments nobody else sees - sitting with someone through their distress, advocating for them when they cannot advocate for themselves, and simply coming back tomorrow when yesterday was difficult.

"You don't do those things expecting recognition, which is why receiving this award feels incredibly special.

"Working in long-term segregation has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my career. It taught me that if the usual approach isn't working for someone, our responsibility isn't to give up on the person, it is to question the approach."

She added: "My greatest achievement will always be the people. For me, progress doesn't always look dramatic. Sometimes it is communicating a need without reaching crisis, finding joy after a difficult period, or simply having a good day. When you know someone's journey, you understand those moments aren't small.

"Behind every diagnosis, behaviour or incident is a person. Our responsibility is to never lose sight of them, especially when their distress makes them hardest to see."

Maryanne Mathews, Ward Manager at Cygnnet Hospital Harrow, described Stephanie's contribution to the service as "transformational".

She said: "Steph has been nothing short of transformational. When we opened the first long-term segregation unit at the service, she joined us from the PICU and became our rock - steady, compassionate and utterly committed.

"What sets Steph apart is impossible to reduce to a job description. She is an unwavering advocate for her staff when they need support and for the individuals in her care when they need somebody in their corner.

"She sees potential in people that they cannot always see in themselves and holds that belief in them steadily until they start to believe it too.

"Steph elevates everyone she works with, staff and patients alike. She doesn't just support people through the good times; she is there in moments of difficulty and fear.

"She has helped us develop a service where people with incredibly complex needs are given another opportunity to move forward. That is Steph's legacy, not because she did it alone, but because she made us believe we could."

Stephanie will be presented with her certificate at the Mental Health Awards annual ceremony at Reading Town Hall on Thursday 8 October.

She said she was grateful to Maryanne, her colleagues and Cygnet for supporting her development.

She added: "Leadership, to me, isn't about having all the answers. It is about creating an environment where staff feel safe to ask questions, reflect, challenge practice and grow.

"I am incredibly grateful to Maryanne and Cygnet for believing in me and giving me the trust, opportunities and space to grow, turn ideas into practice and develop as both a nurse and a leader.

"I am equally grateful to our nursing team and MDT, and most importantly to the individuals we support, who have taught me more about person-centred care than any textbook ever could.

"If, at the end of my career, I am remembered for making people feel heard, advocating for them when they needed somebody in their corner, and leaving things a little better than I found them, rather than for my title or the positions I held, I will be incredibly proud of the career I have built.

"I am incredibly grateful to the Mental Health Awards for this recognition. It genuinely means more to me than I can put into words."