# Nurses launch legal battle over transgender inclusion in changing rooms



Four members of what has become known as the most recognisable 'group of nurses' in Britain are contemplating the potential outcomes had they not been simply identified as 'a bunch of female nurses'. Lisa Lockey, 52, who possesses 35 years of experience within the NHS, posed a hypothetical scenario during a recent interview. She questioned how the dynamics might shift if one of them were to claim their identity had changed and accessed the male changing room without further ado. "How would that have been received?" Lockey asked. She continued, "I don't think they would like it at all" and noted a disparity in how male voices are perceived compared to female voices, lamenting, "Men are listened to way more than women are, unfortunately."

Lockey, alongside her colleagues Tracey Hooper, Annice Grundy, and Bethany Hutchinson, is preparing for a legal battle after they felt sidelined and belittled—“like naughty schoolgirls”—following a complaint against a transgender NHS nurse who had been using their changing room. The situation reached a critical point in 2023 when approximately 26 nurses at Darlington Memorial Hospital expressed their discomfort regarding a colleague, a biological male identifying as a woman, who was reportedly undressing in front of them in the female changing room.

After the nurses raised concerns about feeling threatened and intimidated in what they believed should be a safe space, they were met with a dismissive response from the HR department. They were instructed to "broaden their mindset" and to be more "inclusive," which only intensified their frustrations. "When we raised genuine concerns, the message was, 'Shut up and go away,'" said Hooper, 46, articulating the frustration felt among the nurses.

In a remarkable development, eight of the nurses—facing the threat of disciplinary measures—decided to publicly voice their worries and initiated legal action against the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust. The group has accused the Trust of sexual harassment and discrimination, suggesting that the current transgender-inclusive policies were infringing upon women's rights. This landmark case is under examination and is anticipated to have significant implications for public sector organisations across the UK. A preliminary hearing took place on April 2, where five of the nurses, including Lockey and Hooper, participated.

Initially scheduled for June, the case has since been postponed until October while the Trust conducts an internal investigation. Notably, the nurses succeeded in opposing an application for anonymity regarding their transgender colleague, Rose Henderson. The judge ruled that concealing Henderson's identity would undermine principles of open justice. Bethany Hutchinson clarified that the case isn't focused on Henderson but rather the broader issues concerning the Trust's policies. She emphasised the importance of transparency, noting, "This is not a delicate sort of person—this is a big, burly bloke."

Throughout their discourse, the nurses refer to Henderson using male pronouns, which they claim highlights the contrast between their experiences with other transgender patients and the situation involving Henderson. Lockey expressed her bewilderment at the expectations placed upon them and insisted, "It baffles me that people keep saying this is a trans issue. What we are dealing with is a man who is obviously attracted to women being in the female changing room."

Despite facing accusations of transphobia, the nurses maintain they are not anti-transgender; they are simply advocating for what they believe to be basic rights within their work environment. Their current undertaking is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre.

The case has attracted endorsements from notable figures, including author J.K. Rowling, who stated that "millions of women stand with the Darlington nurses." While these endorsements provide moral support, the nurses note that they are without substantial financial backing compared to their high-profile supporters.

As the tribunal is set to include witness accounts from both nurses and Henderson, the inquiry will delve into the management's responses to the nurses' grievances. The nurses report feeling stonewalled and dismissed, with many of their communications being met with a rigid approach to inclusivity. The delays in addressing their complaints have compounded their grievances.

In reflecting on the predicament they face, the nurses maintain that they are taking a stand not just for themselves but for their daughters and future generations. As they approach the courtroom, they acknowledge the fear surrounding the potential consequences for their careers while being resolute in their commitment to confronting what they see as an unjust situation within their workplace.

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