

Staff bulletin

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News and developments

‘Our stories’ – celebrating your good news and good practice

Welcome to the third in our ‘Our stories – creating change’ series – the ongoing Trustwide series that shines a light on the good news, good practice, and great improvements that go on all over Barts Health every day.

‘Our stories’ is about inspiration and celebration – showcasing the actions we can take, no matter how big or small, to change lives – ours and our patients.

Press to relieve stress – colleagues looking after each other at Barts Health

Stress, a word we often hear expressed to describe the way we feel during particularly difficult times. But how do we respond at work if our colleagues tell us that they feel stressed? Is there anything we can do that could really help?

Well, one person who has answered this question with direct action to assist her colleagues is Maria Okerefor, alcohol liaison nurse, based in A&E at Whipps Cross for the past year.

Maria is not only a professional nurse but also holds a qualification as an auricular acupuncturist, which she has now used to benefit colleagues at Whipps Cross and beyond.

Auricular acupuncture works on the understanding that all organs and tissues in the body have their nerve endings in the ear. Therefore, when you needle the nerve ending (located in the ear) of a particular organ or tissue this triggers the release of healing energy to that specific area. Exciting too is the fact that there is a needling point in the ear that helps the body’s physiology to come into harmony, promoting relaxation, good sleep and acting as a stress-buster.

Don’t believe it?... over to Maria to tell us more:

“I never believed in acupuncture at all – I didn’t think that having a needle applied to the ear by an acupuncturist would have any effect – I was the ultimate skeptic. But my mind was changed some years ago in a previous organisation I worked for supporting people who used drugs and alcohol.

“Auricular acupuncture is often used with these clients to enable them to enjoy relaxation and restful sleep whilst avoiding the use of drugs and alcohol. I was offered formal training as an acupuncturist and as part of the training students had to practice the techniques on each other.

“I was completely shocked at the results...after having the procedure myself my feelings of stress simply fell away and I was able that first night to completely relax and I slept like a baby”.

Through her current work as an alcohol liaison nurse at Barts Health, Maria became very aware of the levels of stress that some of her colleagues were experiencing. Maria explains:

“Wherever I work I want to feel part of the organisation and I feel part of Barts Health”, Maria explains. “So if I can help, in whatever small way, I will. I don’t like to see anyone upset, and if I can help my colleagues to feel less stressed, this will also help the patients”.





Maria shared her desire to support her colleagues' well-being by offering to provide free auricular acupuncture services, firstly with her team and consultants in A&E – who supported her wholeheartedly. With support from her service manager and from the Trust's health and wellbeing co-ordinator, Charmaine Yankey, services are now being offered free to even more staff.

At the first session, 11 members of staff attended, and all sessions for the first three weeks were fully booked. Maria has received very positive feedback as a result – here is just one example:

“Wow wow wow! Maria was amazing last night. I felt completely stress-free after the acupuncture session. I thought I had relaxed for about half an hour and couldn't believe it was 6.40pm when I woke up – I never relax like that. I then had the best night's sleep I have had in years!”

Maria now has staff who visit her on a regular basis at her weekly Tuesday sessions at Whipps Cross and she is keen that as many colleagues as possible benefit from the acupuncture she provides. Maria is providing this weekly service right up until mid-September, when she will then take a well-earned break for annual leave to visit her family in Nigeria.

So what does the positive impact upon staff of her free auricular acupuncture service mean for Maria? Well, let's leave Maria with the final word:

“It really makes me happy to make a difference in the life of my colleagues. Life is a journey and I am here to do whatever I can to make a difference in people's lives. If I am not able to do this, then what am I here for? Working here is a real pleasure, I work in an amazing team, we have an excellent mix culturally, professionally and an amazing team spirit. We learn from each other and the environment is happy. This is the best job I have done since I came to the UK”.

A big thank you to Maria for her generosity, care and compassion to our colleagues – Maria is just one example of the ways in which so many of us demonstrate our commitment to the health and well-being of the Barts Health team.

So, if you do ever feel stressed, why not grasp an opportunity to overcome it? Just take your ear over to Maria!

For more information on the acupuncture sessions, please email healthandwellbeing@bartshealth.nhs.uk, with 'Acupuncture' in the subject line of your email.

Do you or your team have a change story to tell? Just send an email with the name, contact details and an outline of the change you've made to Melanie Lee in Organisational Development by email melanie.lee@bartshealth.nhs.uk.

August staff briefings start today – get the bigger picture

Want to hear the latest on the key challenges facing our Trust? Got questions about our major programmes or want to discuss an issue with your colleagues? Then come along to one of our August Staff Briefings, which start today **Monday 11 August** at Mile End (at 12 noon) and The Royal London (at 1.30pm), with other sites following throughout the week.

