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## TALKING POINT

## John Launer: Why we should all #sayhellotopatients

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I've just had some imaging done at a hospital I attend. I had to wait on a trolley for about 15 minutes while other patients went in to have their own procedures done. As I waited, I noticed something remarkable: 20 or so people happened to walk past me during this time and, almost without exception, smiled and said hello. This included, so far as I could tell, radiographers and doctors, porters and nurses, along with cleaners and other staff.

The experience struck me as extraordinary. I've often waited on trolleys in similar circumstances, and I've generally had the feeling that I was regarded as either invisible or inanimate. It always seemed as though wearing a hospital gown and lying horizontally demoted me from being a worthy member of the human race to an object with no entitlement to be noticed, let alone greeted.

I suspect that there was something exceptional about the culture of the department where I now found myself. Possibly it was the result of training, good role models, or simply having a happy environment where people were looked after and kindness had become the norm. It still made a phenomenal difference to my morale and sense of wellbeing, as well as my satisfaction as a patient.

It made me think of the famous campaign led by the young geriatrician Kate Granger, who had incurable cancer and sadly died in 2016.<sup>1 2</sup> During one of her hospital admissions she'd noticed how many of the staff looking after her didn't introduce themselves. Thinking it terribly wrong for such a basic step in communication to be missing, she devoted the last years of her life to campaigning on social media and more widely, for all healthcare professionals to say their name whenever meeting a patient for the first time. The hashtag #hellomynameis started to appear on name badges. Hospital managers began to inculcate the habit as part of good practice. As a result of Kate's campaign it's now far less common in the UK to meet staff who fail to mention their name or at least to have it clearly legible on their badge.

Drawing on this precedent, I wonder if we should begin a campaign using the hashtag #sayhellotopatients. It would take little effort for each person in the NHS to cultivate a routine of looking directly at every patient we pass and at least nodding politely to acknowledge their existence, if not actually saying hello in every case. Even when crossing a waiting room full of patients, it should be perfectly possible to make eye contact with enough people to show you recognise that they're living, breathing equals, rather than pieces of furniture. Hotel staff are trained to do this as a routine.

My guess is that acting in this natural, human way would also be hugely beneficial to staff and team morale. The effects on patients, to judge by my own experience, would be profound. Let's all just #sayhellotopatients.

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1 hellomynameis. <https://www.hellomynameis.org.uk/>

2 Granger K. Healthcare staff must properly introduce themselves to patients. *BMJ* 2013;347: <https://www.bmj.com/content/347/bmj.f5833>. doi: 10.1136/bmj.f5833 pmid: 24089426