

Christian Nurse Fired for Offering to Pray With Her Ailing Patients

The Employment Tribunal will hear the case of a Christian nurse dismissed by the National Health Service (NHS) after she spoke to patients about her faith and occasionally offered prayer.

Sarah Kuteh, who has 15 years' nursing experience, was sacked for gross misconduct in August 2016. She had worked at Darent Valley Hospital since 2007.

Her job involved asking patients about their faith as part of a pre-op assessment questionnaire. From time to time, this led to a conversation about faith with the patient.

During the time that she worked in the pre-op assessment department, Mrs. Kuteh dealt with several hundred patients.

However, following just one official complaint and a few verbal complaints which were noted down by nurses, Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust began disciplinary proceedings which led to her dismissal. The Trust also referred her to the Nursing and Midwifery Council for disqualification proceedings.

The nursing sister and mother-of-three describes her dismissal as "a hugely disproportionate punishment."

She has made a claim for unfair dismissal, seeking reinstatement and compensation, and she is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre.

'Embarrassing and Painful'

On average, Mrs. Kuteh would see around 30-40 patients a week,

and over the course of six months spoke to hundreds of patients.

Mrs. Kuteh said that although she had no intention of imposing her beliefs on others, she would sometimes tell them about how her own faith in Christ had helped her overcome adversity.

"I would ... reassure them, based on the joy and peace that I really have found in Jesus," she said.

In April 2016, her Matron came into her office and said she had been told by other staff about a few complaints by patients that she had discussed religion with them.

Mrs. Kuteh said that from then on, she would only discuss religion if the patient asked her to. If they initiated the conversation about religion, she would check they were happy.

But in June 2016, she was called into the Matron's office and was shocked to be told that further complaints had been made. Only days later, she was suspended, told to collect her belongings and escorted from the hospital.

Mrs. Kuteh recalls the experience as "embarrassing and very painful," in light of her 15 years' nursing experience.

"I was walked out of that hospital after all I had done during all my years as a nurse, and I was told I couldn't even speak to any of my colleagues," she said.

"All I had done was to nurse and care for patients. How could it ever be harmful to tell someone about Jesus?"

Dismissed With Immediate Effect

After her suspension, Mrs. Kuteh was investigated. NHS management claimed her discussions with patients while filling out the forms were "inappropriate" and made some patients "feel uncomfortable."

During the investigation, she was told that one patient had apparently complained to nurses that she had given her a Bible she did not want and had said she would pray for her, though Mrs. Kuteh said she had only done so after the woman expressed an interest.

While the NHS papers refer to “complaints” from patients, Mrs. Kuteh was only presented with brief handwritten notes by colleagues who had recorded the patients’ comments in a few lines, suggesting the patients casually voiced some discontent.

Mrs. Kuteh did not see the complaints before the investigation hearing and she was not allowed to call the patients to the hearing to investigate their claims.

Following a disciplinary hearing in August 2016, Mrs. Kuteh was dismissed the same day and the Trust referred her to the Nursing and Midwifery Council. She is now facing disqualification proceedings before the NMC.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, she has brought a claim for unfair dismissal at the Employment Tribunal.

‘Motivated by love and compassion’

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of the Christian Legal Centre, commented:

“Sarah Kuteh is an experienced, hard-working senior nurse facing a grossly disproportionate punishment for no more than expressing her Christian faith in the workplace. But for the question on the pre-op assessment questionnaire, these conversations would not have taken place.

“Without proper investigation, she has been fired, and her long career as a nurse has been ruined at the stroke of a pen simply because some patients claimed she had made them feel

uncomfortable. She may never be able to nurse again if the NMC disqualify her.

“Sarah is a motivated nurse, motivated by love and compassion for those she serves in her day-to-day life. Matters arose in the context of discussing the patients’ pre-op assessment questionnaires, which included questions about the patients’ faith.

“This is the latest in the growing list of cases where an expression of Christian beliefs at workplace punishes disproportionately those who live and speak out their faith in public life.

“We hope that the Employment Tribunal Judge will rule that Sarah’s dismissal was unfair, and that she be will reinstated and compensated.”

‘We Are Praying for a Just Outcome’

Mrs. Kuteh’s minister, Pastor Jeremiah Emuchay, of Heart of God Ministry, said: “When we heard what had happened to Sarah we were very upset and referred her immediately to the Christian Legal Centre.

“We know that the Christian Legal Centre helps people dismissed at work for speaking of Jesus, but we couldn’t believe that it had actually happened to Sarah. This is a woman who is passionate about Jesus and passionate about her job. We are all praying for a just outcome.” {eo}

This article originally appeared on Christian Concern. {eo}