

Christian Therapist Suspended for Praying With Muslim Coworker at UK Govt Healthcare Facility

A Christian occupational therapist has been disciplined for praying for a Muslim colleague, despite being encouraged by the colleague to talk about her faith.

Victoria Wasteney, head of occupational therapy at the East London NHS (National Health Service) trust, prayed for the newly qualified Muslim worker after she expressed concerns about her health. When Wasteney offered to pray with her, she willingly agreed and replied, "OK".

But in June 2013, the colleague raised a complaint against Wasteney, who was called before the associate director of therapies the next day and suspended for nine months pending an investigation.

The colleague had never complained to her personally and had always initiated discussions about Wasteney's faith.

"I would have stopped praying immediately if I had thought I was distressing her in any way but faith was openly discussed and encouraged and welcomed by the complainant," Wasteney said.

A disciplinary hearing ruled that Victoria was 'guilty' of three offenses: praying for her colleague, inviting her to church charity events, and giving her a Christian book titled *I Dared to Call Him Father*—the story of a Muslim girl who had converted to Christianity. Wasteney had given the complainant the book just before she was due to go into hospital for treatment.

The ruling against Wasteney was made despite the fact that the complainant failed to attend the disciplinary hearing and one of the witnesses had said he was pressured into making statements against her.

“Entrapped”

“I fear I may have been entrapped by a colleague who encouraged me to discuss my faith, who willingly agreed that I could pray for her and who even accepted an invitation to a church charity event,” Wasteney said.

She added that Christian groups are required to fit around managerial arrangements in the Trust whereas, by contrast, joint staff and service-user Muslim fellowship meetings are always facilitated, regardless of any staffing issues.

“There is undoubtedly a pattern of inequality of treatment of Christians and Muslims in the NHS. Regardless of allocated break times, Muslim staff can pray five times a day, which I am not objecting to, but Christians are often denied time off on Sundays or permission to take breaks during their lunchtime for prayer or religious worship,” she said.

Wasteney is bringing her appeal under the British Equality Act 2010 for discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief.

She is supported in her appeal by the Christian Legal Centre. Standing Counsel to the Christian Legal Centre, leading Human Rights barrister, Paul Diamond, will represent her.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, commented: “The NHS was founded and inspired by Christian principles and precepts. Such heritage meant that the NHS was a model of how to deliver health care across the world; a place of safety, care, freedom and flourishing. Sadly, this case, along with others, demonstrates that today’s climate in the NHS is increasingly dominated by a political

correctness, and a lack of freedom to live out and manifest Christian belief.”

Watch Victoria talk about her case below: