



Supporting Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual and Trans staff,
patients and communities

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Staying Connected

We celebrate
Lesbian Visibility
Week and more



Alistair Gunn and Tony Faraway
24 April 2020



Introduction

This month we have produced one of the most important 15 Minute Reads to date.

In the last month our lives have changed very quickly. At this moment our gender, sexual orientation, skin colour and ability have become less relevant. We are united and equal in a battle to provide an ambulance service whilst a virus is sweeping around the world.

It's unsettling. We don't know how long this will go on for. We know some people will not survive. We know our communities need us. We know that we need each other.

But this is going to be hard. There are going to be times when every single one of us is going to be challenged. Feeling down. Scared. Alone. Physically exhausted. Mentally exhausted.

In this edition we have focused on the things that can make a difference. There is also some good news and things that you can get involved with too. Read on and we hope this 15 Minute Read makes you smile. *

This month's 15 Minute Read has been put together by Alistair Gunn and Tony Faraway, with contributions from many members of the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee.



Fighting Covid Blues



The current situation is something that will undoubtedly impact on us all in one way or another. When it hits hard, and we feel down, there are things we can do to help.

1

As a network we know that sharing our experiences will make a difference, as this helps us feel less isolated and not alone in the feelings we are having. So let's start talking about how we feel.

2

Making sure we have information to hand for those moments of crisis is essential. Sometimes just knowing we have the information is enough, but equally there are many organisations ready to help when needed. We have worked to put up-to-date contact information together for you and we can signpost you to this.

3

Finally, we need to find imaginative new ways to stay connected. Every one of us will have our personal networks, but we are working hard to bring you new methods of support and events to look forward to.



Connections That Matter [1]



1

Network Chair, Alistair Gunn, reflects on his own experience of the first three weeks of lock down. Many will identify with some of his experiences.

The whole lockdown thing seemed to come about very quickly. I will happily admit that, although I knew for several days it was on the cards, I hadn't really contemplated what it would mean or feel like. We enjoy such freedom in this country that being told we can't do something is so far outside our terms of reference that I'd argue we couldn't really anticipate how it would feel anyway.

My usual management role is one I would do from any location so it quickly became apparent I was literally 'locked in'. I should work from home and, like many others would have felt, I sensed a pressure to stay well in case I was needed to return to frontline duties at some point. Week one was scary, week two felt dull and by week three I was just about getting my head around it.

What has certainly become very apparent to me is what connections I really missed and what really matters. I normally live my life quite freely and drop in on people as I go. I've never really asked my family whether they like it or not, but more often than not I call to give five minutes warning that I'm passing and around I go. Speaking every day on the phone is not the same however, and I really miss that half hour catching up, having a gossip and chuckling over something.

The day I dropped some shopping off at my parents was the one that sticks in my mind. I dutifully put everything at the door and stood back two metres. I saw them and we chatted but it felt so wrong. I drove back home close to tears after that one.

Amazingly, we are creatures conditioned to adapt. Getting *Teams* installed on my computer was brilliant. During week two I was back having



Connections That Matter [2]



face-to-face conversations with my colleagues and I think we have managed to be just as productive, if not more so, than any normal working day.

A close friend and myself decided to have a film evening, selecting a DVD we both own and playing it at the same time. During the show we text each other and even have 'half time' to top up drinks. It has actually been good fun and something we didn't do before but long may it continue.

For the National Network we are working out how to keep people in touch and offer some different support mechanisms. I will confess that chairing my first *Teams* meeting was a little daunting but actually went well. Once again, it got everyone connected, the discussions flowed and we have some new things in the pipeline that you'll be hearing about very soon.

The suggestion of a *Teams* drink after work all seemed completely strange until we tried it out.

Once again the conversation seemed to flow and I've learned a few things about certain members of the committee that I didn't know before. It will certainly be interesting to see how quickly I am invited back to do it again. Stick me in my garden house with a G and T and you're likely to witness an unhealthy dose of 'wobblegob'.

As I write this it is my Dad's birthday and in an hour the whole family will be on *Zoom* ready to sing happy birthday and share a piece of cake. My choice of card this year reveals how I feel and I sneakily copied it to show you.

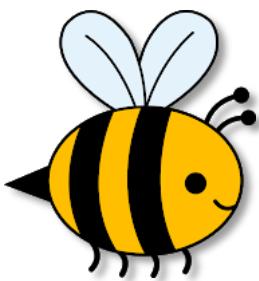


The birthday card that says it all... Everything's closed and I still want a fuss!

Connections That Matter [3]



Last week I sat outside on my lounger enjoying the sun, under the tree in full blossom reading some documents I needed to catch up on. As I did this a huge bumble bee buzzed past and landed on my knee. I stopped breathing for a moment as I noticed how beautiful it was. It sat there quite happily like it had popped over to say, 'Hi, how you doing?' Bees are the enigma of the animal world, the A380 of the insect kingdom but with wings so small they really shouldn't fly. Here was one sat literally on me. What a beautiful moment and a connection that would never have happened if I'd been sat at my desk at headquarters. *



The National Ambulance LGBT Network have been looking at ways to give people a lift at this difficult time. Have a look later in the pack and enter the ballot to get one of our 'Covid Blues-Buster' packs.



Getting to grips with Teams!



Connecting with Support



Useful Mental Health Contacts

The Ambulance Staff Charity (TASC)

TASC is for colleagues and families of colleagues who need of advice or support.

Telephone: 0800 1032 999

Email: support@theasc.org.uk

Unmind

Unmind is a site that offers free access to NHS colleagues with a variety of mindfulness, meditation and yoga sessions.

<https://home.unmind.com>

Mental Health at Work / Our Frontline

Direct access for emergency service workers through Our Frontline.

www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ourfrontline/

Samaritans

Telephone: 116 123 (free 24 hours a day)

Email: jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Mind

The leading mental health charity available with online resources for support, personal advice and assistance.

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

Text: 86463

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines

NHS Employers

This site contains a number of free apps and sites focusing on looking after our own mental health and wellbeing.

www.nhsemployers.org/news/2020/03/free-access-to-wellbeing-apps-for-all-nhs-staff

Shout UK

Heads together provide SHOUT with differing helplines to meet a variety of mental health needs.

Shout Text Response: 85258
(text the word SHOUT)

www.headstogether.org.uk/get-support/

www.ambulanceLGBT.org

National Ambulance LGBT Network

Print one out for your station or office

2

One of our core objectives is to make sure all LGBT staff have access to good quality mental health support. There are a number of organisations in place that can help and especially at the current time when more people are feeling challenged. You can find support on the phone, online and even by text.

Our mental health lead, Jules Lockett, has updated our contact information. We have produced a new poster (shown left) so you can make this available in your work environment. We have also created a new space on the website with hyperlinks to all the online contacts to make it very easy to access them.

www.ambulanceLGBT.org/resources/mental-health/mental-health-contacts/

Finally, remember that the biggest source of support is each other. Look out for your colleagues who may be emotional or more quiet than normal. Ask them, 'Are you okay?'. Even better, let them know you really care and ask twice... 'Are you really okay?'. *

Feeling Connected [1]



3

Tony Faraway has been looking at the different, and imaginative, way people are staying connected with each other and coping with the lockdown blues.

As Alistair has said, Covid-19 has had a huge impact on us all. A whirlwind of changes and a lot of worries have left a lot of us feeling that we need each other more than ever. Simultaneously we cannot get together in the ways we did up until a month ago. Our social life, as we knew it, has largely evaporated. Whilst keeping in touch and talking about feelings are known to be important in looking after our own mental health, many ways in which we would normally do this are just not there at the moment.

On top of this, for many of us our ways of working have also changed. Working from home has its benefits, but it also can blur the boundaries between work life and home life. The discipline of keeping these sufficiently separated is for many of

us a new challenge. I've seen this 'blurring' present moments of amusement at times. I've now met (albeit only on screen) more children and pets of some of my colleagues than I ever otherwise would have done. The chicken sat on a particular manager's shoulder is a particular favourite. Or the time a colleague's daughter tried to add, 'Can I have a chocolate biscuit now, mummy?', as any other business at the end of a meeting.

I've had so many conversations with people about how they are coping with the challenges we are facing. Keeping in touch has been a central theme. Also, in these conversations about keeping in touch, there has been a lot more talk of feelings than previously. I have found myself and others being a lot more 'honest and open' than before. And this has brought us together, has enabled us to, perhaps paradoxically, feel more connected. So, I asked others in the committee for any ideas of theirs they could share...

Feeling Connected [2]



Tony's Time Management



Yeah, right. It's never been my strong point! 😊 However – and this is where the idea of this article came from – it led me to turn off my phones and laptop from Saturday evening until Monday morning for the informational onslaught to start again.

It felt like I'd been on a mini-retreat! Also, I soon realised during the week I didn't have to stick to fixed times of my working day. I've been having a cup of tea in the garden to the dawn chorus, long chats with people who call me after we've finished the work in hand, lunch with my husband, and a siesta if I feel like it. I've done more than my hours – but to a pattern that suits me.

Alistair's Garden Office



GA o GUNN, Alistair (YORKSHIRE AMBULANCE SERV... Saturday, 25 April 2020 at 13:42
To: Tony Faraway

Hello Tony

In response to request for thoughts on how we stay connected and deal with lockdown...
I've been a very dull boy really through the lockdown so far and pretty much managed to stay at home.
I do love my garden and will happily lose myself in tidying and pruning and daft things like that it works for me.
My act of defiance extended to breaking the rule on non-essential items and managed (no detail to be provided here but was all perfectly legal... honest!) to walk away from the local garden centre with a boot full of bedding plants. I felt so smug about that.
When it's been warm outside I have set up an outside office and feel very decadent doing work but languishing in the garden at the same time.
In the grand scheme of things, this will really seem quite sad and hope you'll edit accordingly.

No. I didn't edit it. It's lovely as it is! 😊



Feeling Connected [3]



Jim's Virtual Film Night

Jim Graves and myself have clearly been trying to make the most of the 'virtual' aspects of our new world. During a lovely video-chat last week he mentioned that he and his other half have rigged up a way of simultaneously sitting in front of the 'same' telly – whilst being at two different ends of the country! And they can also see and chat via a different screen at the same time. Not the same as snuggling up on the sofa, I admit, but a very inventive way of making the best of the times we're living in.



Steph's Ironing ...but not as you know it!

This response from Steph has kept me smiling from ear to ear all week! 😊



Steph Meech Saturday
To: Tony Faraway
You replied to this message on 18/04/2020, 11:54
Morning Tony,
So my proposal to get through this situation with a smile on my face is this
I feel that we should embrace Formal Black Tie Ironing That is a black tie event where people will get dressed up in their finest eveningwear just to do the chore of ironing
What do you think

Thanks Steph! 😊

Lesbian Visibility Week 2020



Well, this event certainly caught us off-guard. Not only because of the current situation, but because it appears to be a new fixture in the calendar, evolved from Lesbian Visibility Day. We are keen to embrace the idea, and it has made us reflect on our own network and committee.

Like many facilities and organisations, women are pretty under-represented on the national committee and this is something we are acutely aware of and working to do something about. We talk about LGBT like everything is equal but even within these four letters there is work to do to tackle inequality.

Having said all this, we are very proud of our four 'L' representatives and we have asked each one to talk about their role in the ambulance service, and their challenges and hopes for the future. These are four inspirational people, well deserving of an interval of visibility! *



Jules Lockett



Who are you and what do you do?

Jules Lockett, Practice Learning Manager, 999 Operations at London Ambulance Service (LAS). I am also Co-Chair of the LAS LGBT Network and National Ambulance LGBT Network mental health lead.



How do you feel about working in the ambulance service?

I have worked for the LAS for 19 years, and for all of those years, the pride that the LGBT network brings inspires me greatly. Over the years I have learned from previous network chairs, Trevor and Steph, to help me work alongside and support and learn together with the current co-chairs Lee and Alex. I have never been prouder to work for the service and alongside colleagues who unite and always strive to do their best and care for other people.

What challenges have you experienced?

Having been subjected to an awful social media attack, the support from co-chairs was incredible, as was support from the Trust's Chief Executive and Chair, who equally gave their support, both personally and corporately.

The feeling I had was awful; reading and seeing the most appalling and slanderous things that were being said about me, threatening my partner and myself. It was hideous, hurtful and untrue. It's something that will never leave me, but has made me stronger and wanting to bring more awareness of how to ensure that there is support and protection for our communities and colleagues.

What are your hopes for the future?

My hope is simply that, in future, no one ever faces discrimination for who they want to be and the life they wish to live. *

Emma Burrow



Who are you and what do you do?

I work for North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) NHS Foundation Trust. I am the Research and Development Administrator, and also the chair of our LGBT staff network, Proud@NEAS.



How do you feel about working in the ambulance service?

My dream job since I was young was to work for the ambulance service and be a paramedic. Unfortunately due to physical disabilities I am unable to be a paramedic but I am beyond proud to work for the ambulance service and I am literally living the dream!

What challenges have you experienced?

I started working for NEAS in 2018 and, having previously worked in elderly care which is not an environment I felt I could be openly gay, I very

quickly felt reassured that I could be my 'true self' at NEAS. We organised a rainbow themed dress down day, cake sale and walk of solidarity for IDAHOBIT 2019. We displayed posters around our headquarters to advertise it.

The posters were then pulled down and damaged. This happened numerous times when new posters were put up. I was really upset and shocked at this. I thought that everyone I worked with, especially at headquarters, were inclusive. It made me worry about being open about my sexuality when I'm at work. I really struggled going into work and looking at everyone there wondering if it was that person who didn't like me because I am gay. The management were equally shocked and disappointed that this had happened and spoke to all of their teams to remind them there was zero tolerance for that kind of behaviour. We persevered with the plans and it was a really

Emma Burrow / Kirsten Willis BEM



Emma Burrow (continued)

successful day. I put my own insecurities about what had happened to the back of my mind, wore as much rainbow as possible and I'm so glad that I did. The support and positivity from everyone on the day more than over-shadowed what had happened with the posters.

What are your hopes are for the future?

I hope that by being open and honest about who I am, I can be a positive role model to others so that they know that it's okay to be whoever you really are and recognise that you will be fully accepted and supported. I would love there to be a time where no-one has to 'come out'. Just as straight people don't have to 'come out' as straight, I would love it to be the same for anyone who is LGBT. *



Who are you and what do you do?

I'm Kirsten, I'm a paramedic officer, working as the Head of Operations within South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS). I have worked within the NHS since 1991, initially within physiotherapy in an Acute Trust and then in 1995 moving across to work within Frontline Operations.

How do you feel about working in the ambulance service?

I have been fortunate enough to be able to serve within the ambulance service and the wider NHS, and feel immensely proud of the work we all do each and every day, doing the jobs that we love. But, oh, how things have changed during this time! When I first began I was the only woman on my station, frowned upon I'm sure by many. Gradually change has happened and women began to make their mark on the frontline world.

Kirsten Willis BEM (Continued)



I'm lucky that I have been able to be 'out' in the workplace my entire career, and have never within my Service experienced any discrimination, which I am of course grateful for. Operationally, it has been a different matter, but thankfully it has improved considerably over the years, and I have always been supported by my Trust throughout.

What challenges have you experienced?

Never one to shy away from a challenge, I have always stood up for what I believe is right and proper! So recognising a need within our Service, for support, guidance and inclusivity, I started the SCAS LGBT Network in 2011, which has gone from strength to strength. Not being one to rest on my laurels, I became involved in the National Ambulance LGBT Network at its inception and here I am today, writing as the deputy chair of that as well! Both of these opportunities have allowed me to bring to the

fore the wonderful work that we, as visible women leaders within the LGBT health sector do.

What are your hopes are for the future?

I am unbelievably proud of my fellow female colleagues from the LGBT community, with whom I stand shoulder to shoulder. Of course there is still more to do, and we need a greater representation, but from little acorns, mighty oaks grow. My hope is that we can one day be free of labels, identifiers, campaigns or any such thing, and I can just be ME! *

Lesbian Visibility Week took place for the first time this year and was held between Monday 20 and Sunday 26 April. It is hoped this will be an annual fixture. Lesbian Visibility Day was 26 April.



Val Nash



Who are you and what do you do?

I am Val Nash, I have been in the ambulance service for 18 years and I am an operations officer, I am the chair of our Trust's LGBT Network, I sit on the equality steering group and the wellbeing group. I am very visible as a lesbian at work and wear my rainbow badge every single day with pride. I have just completed a six month secondment to the local hospital as HALO where I go to know lots more staff from others areas and lots of staff asked about my rainbow badge.



How do you feel about working in the ambulance service?

I love working in the ambulance service, I have had several different roles, from Community Responder Manager, to HART paramedic and now Operations Officer. No two days are the

same, I am empowered to make command decisions and to make the welfare of staff my priority especially in these unprecedented times where anxiety is high, looking after staff is very important.

What challenges have you experienced?

My challenge has been mainly in the past is to progress as a female leader, over the last few months I've completed a series of workshops with the South West NHS Leadership Academy on inclusive compassionate leadership this has added to my current skill set and helped me progress as a female leader within my Trust.

What are your hopes are for the future?

My hopes for the future is that we have more female leaders and more visible LGBT community members as leaders. *

Conference and Pride Updates

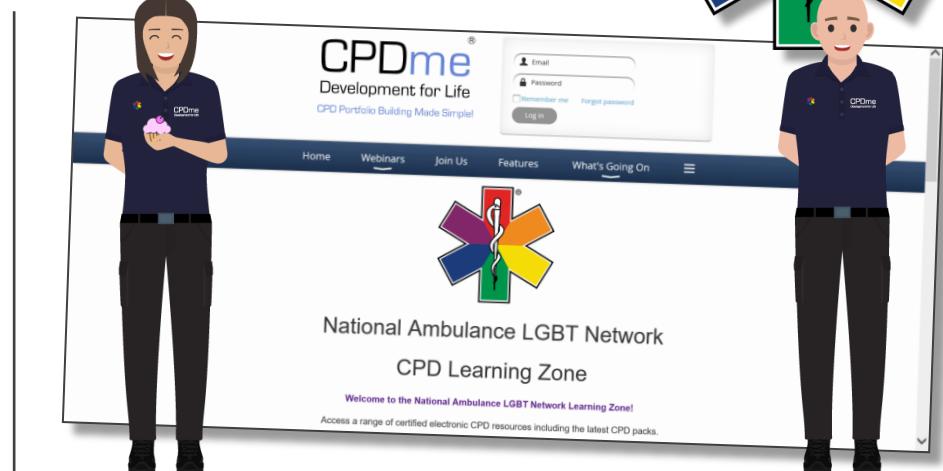


This time of year is when we are normally getting ready for a busy summer of Pride and TransPride events, and also preparing for the National Ambulance LGBT Network conference. The not so good news is we had to cancel the conference we had planned to take place in Bristol on 10 July 2020. Most Pride events are also cancelled.

Do not despair though, we are hoping to bring you a virtual conference, packed with talks and new CPD content – when the time is right and pressures on our services return to normal.

We are not going to let the cancellation of Pride events stop us from celebrating the magnificent progress being made to support LGBT people in all our ambulance services. If we can't go to Pride, we'll bring it to you. To help us to do this we would like you to send your photos and special memories of previous Pride events to:

tony.faraway@me.com



Our amazing friends at CPDme have added new content to the National Ambulance LGBT Network Learning Zone site. You can revisit keynotes speeches from our 2018 and 2019 conferences. If you didn't make it to one of these events, why not settle down one evening to explore some of the new content?

[www.cpdme.com/
LGBTNetwork](http://www.cpdme.com/LGBTNetwork)

CPDme
Development for Life



Tweets of Support



Many thanks to the LGBT Foundation who captured some of the many tweets that show the love and encouragement the public are expressing towards our magnificent NHS workers.



jayfr18 You all fantastic and a total credit to your profession all round and brain as a whole. Keep up the great work and let's get back of normal life's. 🌈😊❤️🌈
let's show the world show great Great Britain is in crisis.



1h 1 like Reply



philwhite70 Thank you for all the amazing work you're doing every day. The risks you're taking day after day for all of us make you all heroes, and the love we have for you all can't be put into words. ❤️🧡💛💚💙💜



3h 2 likes Reply



cameronggough Keep up the amazing work, a beautiful rainbow will follow this storm 🌈



5h 3 likes Reply



saraeem I'm proud of the working you're doing, I'm proud of our NHS! 🌈❤️👏 my claps can never be loud enough 🙌



4h 2 likes Reply



weeabodork thank you all for your hard work and determination to help those affected by this cruel pandemic, we truly appreciate it ❤️❤️



5h 2 likes Reply



'Covid Blues-Buster' Packs



Over at LGBT headquarters we have been doing a bit of spring cleaning and selected some network goodies to be given away. We hope to make 100 of you smile when you receive your pack, and if you hand on one of the contents to someone else that could be 100 more smiles!

Each pack will contain badges, a rainbow star of life keyring and some additional items we are sure you will like.



If you want to be included in the draw for one of the packs you simply need to follow the instructions below, using the new contact feature on our website.

To qualify for one of the packs you must work for a UK ambulance service. The draw will be made on 15 May 2020 and packs will be sent out shortly afterwards. Don't worry if your name is not drawn this time, there will be more events coming up.

If you would like to be entered into the draw for one of the Covid Blues-Buster packs, simply send us a message from the contact function on our website. Select the option 'Send me a Covid blues-buster pack' and provide your full name, postal address, job role and the ambulance service for which you work.

www.ambulancegbt.org/contact/

LGBT Foundation Cables



For every unit sold £1.00 goes to LGBT foundation



We have been contacted by the company that is producing some charging cables in rainbow colours that are being sold to support LGBT causes. For every sale of the cable, £1 is donated to the LGBT Foundation. Since the Covid-19 lockdown has commenced, the company has also committed to donate an additional £1 to support the NHS.

The four charging cables include the new Apple USB style cable to be incorporated into all future Apple products.

If you would like to purchase one or more of these cables we have been offered a promotional code enabling you to obtain 10% discount. You will need to purchase the cable from the website below and input the code **LGBT10** at the checkout.

www.supportlgbt.co.uk

Picture View



Thank you to Abigail Jinks from Doncaster who posted this picture through our Chair's letter box shortly after the start of the Covid-19 lockdown.

