

Advancing Healthcare Awards 2018: Speech by AHPF Chair, Parmjit Dhanda

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. And most importantly, my dear AHPs, who have come together today from across the country to be part of the Allied Healthcare Awards.

It's a privilege to be here with you, and an honour to be Chair of the Allied Health Professions Federation. In recent weeks pay and investment in the NHS has been in the news. That's welcome. But not only does the NHS need more staff and better pay, it also needs the quality leadership to ensure that the investment makes a difference for patients.

My message to you today, is a simple one: Allied Health Professionals hold the Key to better Leadership in the NHS.

But, if you asked ten people on the street what an allied health professional (AHP) does, you would get a blank stare from the majority. But they know you. They know the occupational therapists, dieticians, chiropodists and podiatrists; people who are involved in early intervention, people who can save you from being admitted to a hospital.

But alarmingly, in a world where doctors, nurses and hospital beds have become the political currency of the NHS, most politicians would be left scratching their heads too, when asked about Allied Health Professionals. That's why events like this matter.

It's small wonder that AHPs are so under-represented in senior roles in the NHS. In Foundation Hospital Trust boards that under-representation has been institutionalised by the ring-fencing of Nursing Directors and Medical Directors (who are nearly always doctors). Don't get me wrong - having doctors and nurses on hospital boards is a good thing, but if you want to have a diversity of medical experience and if you want to disrupt the group-think that can hold back the creative thinking our health service needs to serve patients well, then you need more AHPs in leadership roles.

They could be physiotherapists, radiographers, speech and language therapists – people who rehabilitate you from your illness and people who reduce your stay in hospital.

I won't go on listing the whole phalanx of AHP professionals that make up the third largest group of health workers in the UK – people who understand the patient's pathway from early intervention through primary and secondary care, through hospitals and post hospital care.

The Allied Health Professions Federation recently met with the Health Minister Philip Dunne, shortly before he was reshuffled. To be fair it was a good meeting. We know we have a shared problem. At a time of Brexit there will be no parliamentary time to change rules that are prejudiced against AHPs from taking seats around some of the major decision-making tables.

In a week when we were reminded, in a sad way, of the contribution to our country of the Windrush generation. A reminder to us of how diversity has helped to build the NHS, ladies and gentlemen. And diversity of roles and skills can take it to the next level.

But until we find a way of getting the most out of the rich diversity of talent and knowledge from its staff in to senior levels, we won't see the full range of benefits from early intervention or rehabilitation that is quietly being delivered each day by Allied Health Professionals. By you. The NHS is not just about doctors, nurses and hospital beds after all.

And today, we will celebrate you. In all your glory. Good luck!