



People are not simply one aspect of their identity

DR SEAN PERT

Why does diversity matter?

Dr Sean Pert on encouraging a range of identities to flourish


As Chair of the Board of Trustees, I am privileged to be working alongside the most diverse board at RCSLT ever. We have members who are people of colour, as well as diversity that may be hidden or less immediately obvious such as disability, social class, religious belief or sexuality. Why does this matter? It's important that a range of voices are heard and that as many different viewpoints are represented. The bottom line is that "Diversity is associated with better financial performance and a higher quality of patient care." (Gomez & Bernet, 2019). This is a challenge for our profession, as we are among the least diverse of the allied health professions (AHPs). The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2021) reported that 89% of SLTs were white, and 96% were women. Only 7% reported a disability; 3% identified as lesbian, gay or queer, and 0.25% identified as trans. Religious belief was also predominantly Christian (44%) or no religion (39%).

The percentage of men in SLT remains stubbornly low. Why encourage more men into the profession when men dominate many other careers? Fathers are often overlooked in research. We know there are benefits for both children with disabilities and the fathers themselves when involved in the care of their children (Ansell et al, 2018). Men communicate differently, including voice, facial expression and language usage (Adler, 2018). If men are excluded, we lose


this diversity of human communication, and valuable role models.


Men are often subject to different standards and expectations. As an out gay man qualifying in the mid-1990s, I was advised to work only with adults. Many of the men who are students have had their interaction style, play and language usage criticised when they are simply using a more masculine style.

'Diversity' often rightly evokes discussion about ethnicity. However, people are not simply one aspect of their identity. Intersectionality is important. The value is in the synergy of the team and how diversity brings a wide range of experiences and values to work. I work alongside care navigators, GPs and managers who are LGBTQ+, and I have found that trans and non-binary service users recognise and appreciate the welcome change of perspective that brings.

How could you help those who might otherwise see barriers? Perhaps you will encourage young people of colour to consider speech and language therapy as a career, or support a person with a disability to apply for a promotion? You might also consider running a Giving Voice campaign activity to encourage service users to advocate for themselves [rcslt.org/get-involved/giving-voice](https://www.rcslt.org/get-involved/giving-voice). And why not think about joining one of our governance committees? 

Dr SEAN PERT, RCSLT Chair of Trustees

 sean.pert@rcslt.org

 @SeanPert