

Conversations for Kindness

Compassion and Kindness in Leadership

21 December 2023

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## About the movement

**Conversations for Kindness** is a monthly virtual meeting that was set up in the summer of 2020 by eight colleagues and friends working in healthcare across Sweden, the UK and the USA: Bob Klaber, Dominique Allwood, Maureen Bisognano, Goran Henriks, Suzie Bailey, Anette Nilsson, Gabby Matthews and James Mountford. The purpose of the meeting was to have some time together to continue some initial conversations around kindness, and its role at the 'business end' of healthcare, and to plan interactive workshops on this topic.

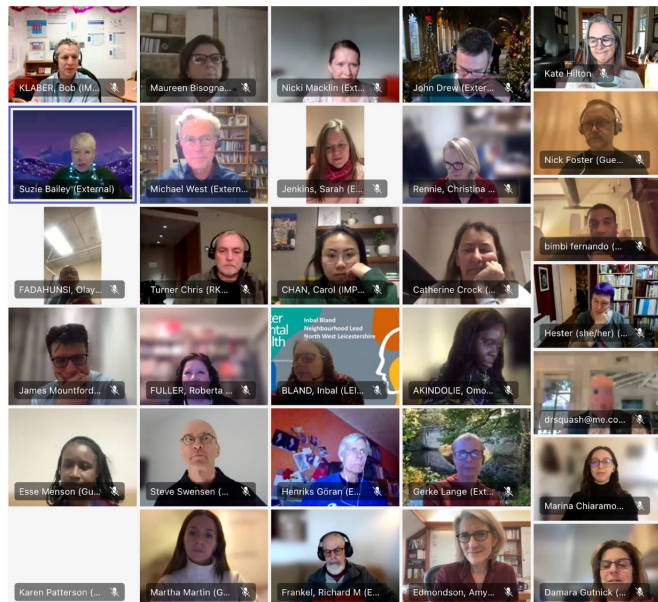
## Conversations for Kindness

- Monthly Zoom call on the third Thursday of every month (6-7pm GMT)
- A focus on listening, learning, thinking differently and mobilising for action
- An open culture of sharing of resources, energy and ideas

If you would like to join the conversation for kindness, please complete this **[contact form](#)**

# On the day: coming together from across the world

More than 60 Kindness in Healthcare community members came together from all over the world for the last Conversation for Kindness of 2023!

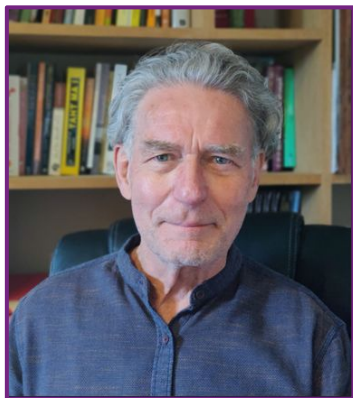


For this Conversation, we were joined by Professor Michael West who spoke on compassion and kindness in leadership.

We then spent time in breakout groups reflecting on a question Michael posed, before coming back together for final sharing and reflections.

If you missed the session, you can [watch the recording here.](#)

# Speaker profile: Professor Michael West



*Professor  
Michael West*

Michael is Professor of Work and Organisational Psychology at Lancaster University, Visiting Professor at University College, Dublin, Emeritus Professor at Aston University, and a Senior Visiting Fellow at The King's Fund. He has authored, edited and co-edited 20 books and has published more than 200 articles on teamwork, leadership and culture, particularly in healthcare.

Michael has extensive experience of working to improve staff experience and care quality. He assisted the development of the national frameworks on improvement and leadership development in England and Northern Ireland, and is currently supporting Health Education and Improvement Wales to develop the national health and care leadership strategy in Wales. He co-chaired the two-year inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of doctors for the General Medical Council. He also led the research at The King's Fund in partnership with the RCN Foundation into the mental health and wellbeing of nurses and midwives across the UK, [The courage of compassion: supporting nurses and midwives to deliver high quality care \(2020\).](#)

# Insights from Michael West: Happiness, work and collective action

- Michael first discussed the relationship between happiness and work. Given that we spend the bulk of our waking hours at work, our working environment is hugely important to our happiness as human beings. Now more than ever, our work has a significant impact on our overall happiness, relationships, health and wellbeing.
- Michael also spoke about how these are dark and challenging times for humanity but collective action can drive hope. In particular, collective action that is focused on kindness and compassion.
- Creating conditions for compassion within healthcare was highlighted as a priority in ensuring happier workplaces for those delivering care.



# Insights from Michael West: Compassion

- Michael spent time exploring what compassion actually means. He shared Paul Gilbert's definition which identifies compassion as 'a sensitivity to suffering of self and others, with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it' (Gilbert, 2017).
- There are four main components of compassion:
  - Attending** - being present
  - Understanding** - listening with intent
  - Empathising** - seeking to understand others' suffering
  - Helping** - acting to alleviate it
- The intent to help or serve in some way is the final and key part of compassion, and the main difference between empathising alone, and compassionate actions.



# Insights from Michael West: Implementing compassionate practices

- Michael talked about the challenge of creating the conditions for compassion inside our healthcare environments and teams and shaping the culture in a way that can impact on our team functioning and relationships. **A key factor is compassionate leadership.**

## Compassionate leaders should:

- Be courageously present with staff
- Listen to staff with curiosity and intent to understand
- Empathise with staff struggles and difficulties
- Take action to help alleviate staff suffering

## This involves:

- ★ Giving difficult feedback when needed
- ★ Addressing difficult behaviors or situations
- ★ Leaning into issues of social justice
- ★ Recognising compassion is needed at all levels

- Compassionate leadership not only improves staff engagement and functioning but creates positive culture and relationships, enables teams to perform optimally and ultimately allows organisations to succeed.



# Insights from Michael West: Example of a whole-system compassionate approach

Conversations about compassion and kindness take place at different levels – at an individual level, but also at a teams and culture level, at an institutional and national level.

Michael gave an example of whole-of-system approach: Wales is investing huge resources and capacity across the whole healthcare system to implement changes that can nurture and grow compassion across and throughout the socio-ecological system.



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES | Addysg a Gwella Iechyd  
Cymru (AaGIC)  
Health Education and  
Improvement Wales (HEIW)

Gwella  
HEIW Leadership Portal  
for Wales

## Compassionate Leadership

- Gwella @ HEIW Evidence based resources and tools
- Compassionate Leadership Programme
- Advanced Clinical Leadership Programme
- Leading with compassion (TKF)
- Senior Leadership Experience
- Mutual / Reverse mentoring

## Compassionate Teams

- Compassionate Team Assessment
- Affina OD Team Performance Inventory and Team Journey Diagnostic
- Co-Lead Team tools
- Commitment to Inclusion

## Compassionate Cultures

- NHS Wales staff survey
- Pulse surveys
- Compassionate Leadership Self & 360 Assessment
- NHS Wales Core Principles
- Compassionate Leadership Principles
- Board Development Programme Professor M West
- NHS E Culture & Leadership Programme

## Compassionate Structures

- Compassionate Recruitment
- Inclusive Talent Management
- Collective Leadership
- Team Based Working
- Aspiring Executive Director Talent Pools
- Aspiring Chief Executive Officer Programme

## Compassionate Policies and Procedures

- Staff Welfare Project
- ABC of Core Needs
- Healthy Working Relationships
- Improving Employee Investigations
- Systematic Workforce Policy Review

## Compassionate Systems

- Workforce Strategy
- Leadership vision and values
- NHS Wales Workforce Implementation Plan
- Compassionate Wales
- Design, Evaluation and impact
- Strategic OD Programme
- Integrated working

# Insights from Michael West: Final reflections on compassion

Michael talked about the [Global Compassion Coalition](#) with more than 120,000 members from around the world, who have been working to advance concepts of compassion in culture and leadership. The Coalition has grown rapidly since it was founded in September 2022, showing a real appetite globally for increasing compassion.

Michael concluded his talk discussing self-compassion. He reminded us that none of this work is possible if we do not look after ourselves too. He shared the following:

**“Fierce self-compassion is the powerful action-oriented side of caring for ourselves that we can harness to make our days fulfilling and meaningful,”** quoting Dr Kirsten Neff.



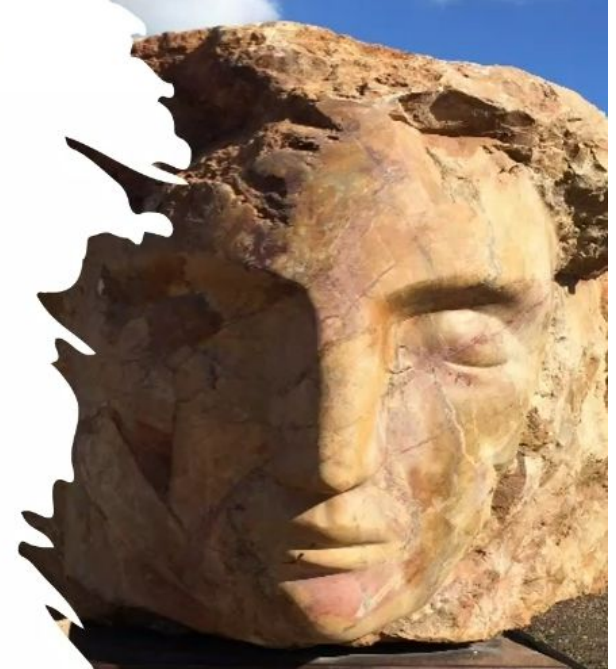
# Breakout group discussion

Michael posed us the question, *“How can we better engage senior leaders, policy makers, politicians and communities in conversations for kindness and compassion in health and care?”*

We then spent around 15 minutes in randomised breakout groups discussing before coming back to share with the whole group.

## Discussion question

How can we better engage senior leaders, policy makers, politicians and communities in conversations for kindness and compassion in health and care?



# Breakout group discussion

**Mo** talked about the challenge of people being promoted into leadership positions without having demonstrated compassionate behaviours, making it challenging to then convince them of the value of this kind of behaviour when they are in leadership. Her group talked about how this should change, and perhaps we need to be implementing a rule that no one is promoted without a strong compassionate feedback score from both patients and colleagues, and perhaps we need to provide compassion coaches for our leaders.

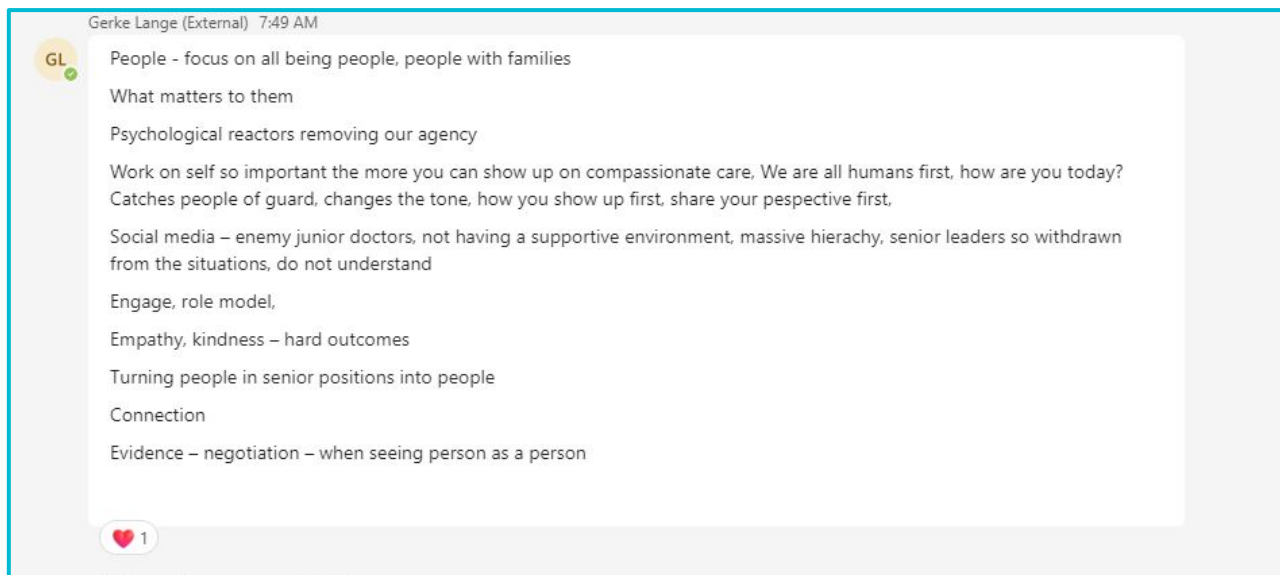
**Michael** highlighted the importance of clinicians receiving feedback, not as a stick to beat them but as a development tool.

**Susan** spoke about her experience working with Bob Klaber in a clinical setting and the palpable culture of kindness she experienced in that space.

**Kate** reiterated the importance of the four steps of compassion and how that resonated. She also spoke about how we make room for more people at the table – not just the leaders but inviting others in to do the problem solving.

# From the chat...

Throughout the session, chat was used as a tool for sharing, reflection and connection. A selection has been captured below:





# From the chat...

Turner Chris (RKB) E Consultant (Est) (External) 7:56 AM

TC One of the difficult things of being a compassionate leader is that it hurts to do some of the things we have to do as leaders, and being compassionate means facing that there may be hurt for others in our actions. It possibly hurts less if you are judgemental and decide others are "bad", therefore giving yourself the moral authority to punish others... this is where kindness coaching can be incredibly powerful, helping to avoid the judgemental perspective and being able to sit with the discomfort of some tough decisions whilst being caring to those who are affected.



IB

James... 21/12/2023, 18:13  
who first said "assume good intent"? (i think...

this is hugely important, we choose how we interpret what we hear or perceive as well, and often assign negative intent when people are just doing the best they can with what they have at any given time



Edmondson, Amy (External) 18:23

AE Kindness is contagious



# Further resources

During the session, participants also shared relevant resources they recommended to others, including:

- This [long read article about compassionate leadership](#)
- The ['Caring for Doctors, Caring for Patients' report](#)
- [Hope in the Dark](#), a book all about the power of people
- [A podcast episode](#), discussing 'Why Kindness Matters'
- The [Global Compassion Coalition website](#)



# Further resources

- An [online Compassionate Leadership hub](#)
- [Results from the 2022 NHS Staff Survey](#)
- A [TED talk by Loretta Ross](#): 'Don't call people out -- call them in'
- [Professor Michael West's book](#) on Compassionate Leadership in Health and Social Care



# Acknowledgements

This insights pack has been co-produced by  
**Nicki Macklin** and the team at **Kaleidoscope Health and Care**

For all enquiries please contact us [via the Kindness in Healthcare website](#) or email  
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See you next month for another great Conversation.