

SINGLE SEX WARDS

Sajid Javid Must Protect Single-Sex Wards

The Women's Rights Network (WRN) is appalled, but unsurprised, that some NHS staff are calling on Trusts to ignore updated guidance from the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) (EHRC)[1] which confirms our legal right to single-sex wards.

We call on the Health Secretary Sajid Javid to remind Trusts that they have a duty of care to safeguard women, who are often at their most vulnerable when they are ill.

WRN advises anyone who has concerns that a man is being accommodated on the same ward as women to raise a complaint with the [Patient Advice Liaison Service](#) (PALS).[2]

The exemptions and protected characteristics set out in the [2010 Equality Act](#)[3] make it clear that women have the right to single-sex spaces in places such hospitals, refuges and changing rooms.

[Heather Binning](#), from the WRN – a grassroots movement formed to protect the rights of women and children – said, 'Mixed hospital bays and wards are a clear threat to the safety, privacy and dignity of women'.

This is one of many reasons that the WRN has joined forces with [Sex Matters](#) and [Women Uniting](#) to urge all politicians to support our [Respect My Sex](#) campaign.

We encourage voters to ask all candidates for the 2022 Elections to provide a definition of a woman that does not include men, and to support only those candidates who will support and protect sex-based rights.

Heather said, 'The safeguarding risks of mixed-sex wards were already well known. Last month, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne told the House of Lords that a hospital had admitted that a woman may have been raped by a transgender patient, after denying the possibility of an attack for almost a year'.[4]

Baroness Nicholson pointed out the inherent danger in the NHS guidance now being used to incite a revolt against the EHRC: 'The result of Annex B is that hospital trusts inform ward sisters and nurses that if there is a male, as a trans person, in a female ward, and a female patient or anyone complains, the patient must be told that it is not true – that there is no male there'.[5]

'I think it is completely wrong that the National Health Service should be instructing or allowing staff to mislead patients – to tell a straightforward lie. It is not acceptable'.

She told the Upper Chamber she believes the policy should be withdrawn because it 'gives priority to trans people over women' and therefore threatens the 'dignity, privacy and safety' of female patients.

This was not an isolated incident. In 2020, a judge made a point of criticising an Irish hospital after a 17-year-old girl was sexually assaulted on a mixed-sex ward.[6] And data published by the Health Service Journal shows there are almost five times as many assaults on mixed mental health wards as there are on single-sex wards.[7]

Heather said, 'This situation exposes the retrograde nature of the current debate around the erosion of women's rights.

'A decade ago, NHS Trusts were – quite rightly – being criticised for failing to meet government targets to provide same-sex accommodation. Now women are being accused of unreasonable behaviour, or transphobia, for trying to protect their legally protected rights to single-sex spaces'.[8]

'Contrary to the claims of some activists and lobby groups, sex and gender are not the same; they are not interchangeable terms.

'Our sex is defined by biology. It is determined by our chromosomes and set at the moment of conception. As Professor Robert Winston and others have pointed out, we cannot change sex'.[9] Gender relates to how people feel about their sexuality and feelings, which as we all know can vary from day to day.

'There is also a huge difference between a transsexual man, who has undergone gender reassignment surgery, and a man in a dress – and the British public has no doubt about this.

'When YouGov asked whether or not "A transgender woman is a woman", most people answered "yes" and thought this group should have access to women's spaces. But when the public was asked about those who had NOT undergone gender reassignment surgery, the majority thought they should not be allowed to use female changing rooms and toilets'.[10]

'Some politicians and commentators may struggle to define what a woman is, but the vast majority have no trouble telling the difference between a woman and a man. We urge them to send a clear message to all Election 2022 candidates to respect sex-based rights'.

[1] [EHRC guidance on single-sex spaces.](#)

[2] [NHS website: How to contact PALS](#)

[3] [2010 Equality Act; single-sex exemptions.](#)

[4] [Hansard transcript.](#)

[5] [Baroness Nicholson.](#)

[6] [Irish Times: woman assaulted on ward.](#)

[7] [Hospital assaults.](#)

[8] [Nursing Times: failure to meet targets to end mixed-sex wards.](#)

[9] [Daily Telegraph: Winston 'humans can't change sex'](#)

[10] [YouGov poll.](#)