

Honoring Disability Pride Month: Andrea Dalzell ‘The Seated Nurse’ is Breaking Barriers in Healthcare

Insights

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In celebration of the ongoing efforts to advance healthcare equity and disability rights, we honor the remarkable contributions of [Andrea Dalzell, RN](#), known widely as “The Seated Nurse.” As the first wheelchair-using registered nurse in New York State, Dalzell has shattered preconceptions and opened doors for countless [healthcare professionals with disabilities](#) while advocating tirelessly for inclusive healthcare environments.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Andrea Dalzell’s path to nursing excellence began with a life-altering diagnosis at age five when she was diagnosed with transverse myelitis, a rare inflammatory condition affecting the spinal cord. Throughout her childhood, she navigated mobility using a combination of wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches before transitioning to full-time wheelchair use by age 12. Rather than allowing this challenge to limit her aspirations, Dalzell channeled her experiences into a profound understanding of healthcare from the patient perspective—a foundation that would later inform her compassionate approach to nursing.

After earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing and becoming a registered nurse in 2018, Dalzell faced the harsh reality of systemic barriers within the healthcare system. Despite her qualifications and dedication, she was turned down for 76 different clinical nursing positions—a testament to the pervasive misconceptions about the capabilities of healthcare professionals with disabilities. During this challenging period, she found work as a school nurse and camp health director, continuously building her expertise while advocating for change.

As the demand for nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic increased, Dalzell’s experience with ventilators made her particularly valuable in ICU settings. In 2020, she finally secured the position that would make her the first wheelchair-using registered nurse in New York State. This historic achievement not only represented personal triumph but also challenged long-held assumptions about disability in healthcare settings.

Beyond her clinical work, Dalzell has emerged as a powerful voice for disability rights in healthcare through her platform as “The Seated Nurse.” She was [honored as Person of the Year](#) in 2021 by New Mobility, a publication by the United Spinal Association. Through social media advocacy and public speaking, she addresses the misconceptions that prevent qualified individuals with disabilities from entering and thriving in healthcare careers. Her message is clear and empowering: “Any person, with any type of disability can be a nurse. The misconception comes with the fact that having a disability means you’re incapable. Every single person’s ability is different.”

Dalzell’s story illuminates critical issues within healthcare systems regarding accessibility for providers with disabilities. The significance of representation in healthcare cannot be overstated. When healthcare providers with disabilities care for patients, they bring unique perspectives and empathy that can improve patient outcomes and satisfaction. Dalzell’s presence in clinical settings serves as powerful representation for patients with disabilities who have historically felt marginalized within healthcare systems.

As we honor Andrea Dalzell’s contributions to healthcare and disability rights, we are reminded that true healthcare equity requires not only accessible care for patients with disabilities but also inclusive opportunities for healthcare professionals with disabilities. Her legacy serves as a beacon of possibility, illuminating the path toward a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system where ability is measured by competence, compassion, and commitment to excellence.