

A cross to bear



This week, four Christians will argue in court that they face discrimination in Britain because of their faith.

Discriminated: A woman who was asked to remove her cross while working as a nurse is taking her case to the European Court of Human Rights to argue that she has suffered discrimination as a result of her faith Photo: ALAMY

Shirley Chaplin shrinks from the limelight. As she sits in a modest bungalow in Devon, she struggles to relax, her arms wrapped around herself protectively as she recalls her private anguish.

On Tuesday, the spotlight will be inescapable. Mrs Chaplin, a nurse for more than 30 years, left the NHS at the age of 55. She did so because she felt forced to choose between nursing – the profession she loved – and her Christian faith.

It is more than three years since she was stopped on the ward by a senior colleague and asked to remove “her jewellery” – the crucifix worn around her neck since confirmation at the age of 16.

Her refusal, amid attempts to explain the importance of the religious token to her, saw the ward sister stripped of contact with patients and put on administrative duties.

Attempts to persuade a industrial tribunal to let her return to nursing failed, with the Royal Devon and Exeter foundation trust insisting that although Mrs Chaplin had worn the silver symbol for more than three decades without complaint, the cross had now been deemed a “health and safety” risk.

This week she will be one of four Christians who will go to the European Court of Human Rights to argue, in a landmark case, that they have suffered discrimination as a result of their faith.

Mrs Chaplin will travel to Strasbourg with Gary McFarlane, a relationship counsellor sacked for saying he might not feel comfortable giving sex therapy to gay couples, Nadia Eweida, a British Airways employee prevented from wearing a cross, and Lilian Ladele, disciplined by Islington Council for

refusing to conduct civil partnership ceremonies for homosexual couples.

There, judges will consider whether British laws are failing to protect the rights of Christians.

Laura Donnelly - The Telegraph