

Overcoming the Difficulty in Treating Incarcerated Clients

Kathleen Serrano

Lakeview College of Nursing

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Brittany Lawson, MSN, RN, CMAC

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“I have neither given nor receive, nor will I tolerate others’ use of unauthorized aid”.

My signature also verifies I will follow all student rules as established in the student handbook/college catalog.

Kathleen Serrano

Name

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Date

A nurse's job is to aid and positively impact a client's health-whether that is mentally, physically, spiritually, or all of the above. However, for many nurses some clients may be difficult to treat due to personal biases and not being culturally well-versed due to various external and internal factors such as socioeconomic status, prejudices, family background, etc. These vulnerable clients are part of a minority population and have unique needs. In particular, I believe that incarcerated individuals are especially vulnerable and difficult for many nurses to treat.

It is a nurse's responsibility to be culturally competent. Cultural competence means the ability of a person, organization, or facility to have a strong and equal set of policies, behaviors, attitudes, and principles that can be applied across all people of various cultures (DeAngelis, 2015). For a nurse to be culturally competent they must forget any notion about ethnocentrism, identify their values, beliefs, biases and prejudices, actively and habitually utilize cultural awareness, learn to culturally communicate and strategize based on clients, interact with culturally diverse individuals, acknowledge and know personal misconceptions or mistakes, and improve partaking in cultural errors through experience and adjustment (Hood, 2018, pp. 280-282). No matter the cultural background or beliefs, a nurse's purpose is to provide the best care possible to all client's regardless of culture, to communicate to provide excellent care, and to learn from culturally diverse clients for the betterment of oneself and for future clients.

For me, treating incarcerated individuals is going to be difficult. My initial thoughts to the word incarcerated is evil, murderer, rapist, drug dealer, etc. In addition to that prejudice, I am unsure of the severity of the crime committed, if this is a first offense or more, how long their sentence is, and if this individual is combative. Crimes are serious immoral matters to me because I have many family members in the police force who risk their lives daily. Also, being raised in a Catholic background really has struck the fear of God into me about sinning and committing crimes, which is scary to think about and truly does frighten me. Despite my fear and other strong feelings about crime, I would like to know what

crime or crimes the incarcerated patient I will be caring for committed. In my perspective, it would lessen the difficulty for me if it was a less severe charge like drug possession or tax fraud. In contrast, it would increase the difficulty for me to treat an incarcerated individual who has committed a mass shooting or who has a history of abusing and harming children. Morally it will be taxing on me because I know it is my duty to help all clients to the best of my ability, but it will be hard treating and caring for someone who has committed a heinous crime. There will be a lot of inner conflict for me that I will have to overcome in order to truly fulfill my duty as a nurse.

As a nursing student, I have failed to consider the actual healthcare needs of incarcerated patients, and their health deficits and struggles until now. Incarcerated patients regardless of their crime or crimes are human beings in need of treatment and care from competent professional nurses. Many incarcerated individuals have or will contract serious chronic illnesses like hepatitis C or arthritis, mental disorders, and different types of drug and alcohol abuse (Martin, et al., 2020). Even worse is that there is a mandate in place that incarcerated individuals must be treated with medical care as needed or in general, but barely any health assessments like physical exams are done, medications and prescriptions are not provided or available, sick incarcerated individuals are not taken to the hospital, and the medical team at prison and correctional facilities are not competent enough for a lot of care especially emergency care or trauma (Martin, et al., 2020). Many mental and psychiatric incarcerated individuals need extra health assistance such as weekly examinations, medications, and just care in general. Unfortunately, most mental and psychiatric incarcerated individuals are left untreated or in emergency care are only taken to an Emergency Department if they have another serious medical condition that requires immediate care (Martin, et al., 2020). It is not the fact that this psychiatric or mentally ill individual is having a real mental issue, but only if it is another condition that may not have to do anything with their mental health. This is really disheartening and scary as incarcerated clients with mental or psychiatric issues can experience a further decline because they are not treated as they

should be or provided the medical care that is constitutionally theirs. Another unique need of incarcerated clients is specifically for females concerning labor and delivery. Some incarcerated females may be pregnant and give birth in a correctional facility or jail, and there is not much support for that (Dahl et al., 2020). This woman will have no one for support during birth besides an officer and medical staff, which includes nurses (Dahl et al., 2020). Not to mention that sometimes these women may be shackled during birth, which can make birthing that much more traumatic and frightening for a woman (Dahl et al., 2020).

Taking this all into perspective as a nursing student I truly and thoroughly need to keep my own prejudices in check and not allow them to impede on my performance as a nurse to provide the best care possible for all my future clients. Clearly, I am not culturally competent, nor have I completely let go of prejudices and my beliefs; however, I am in the process of acknowledging them, and working with diverse individuals. I have a long way to go, but I am on the right track and I will be able to care for and treat vulnerable populations competently and with excellence as a nurse.

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