

Cultural Competence of the American Indian

Toni Andres

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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”.

Cultural Competence of the American Indian

This paper will discuss issues, such as disparities in healthcare, a general understanding of the importance of cultural competency in healthcare and discuss the vulnerable population of the American Indian regarding the healthcare system.

The Impact of Healthcare

Disparities in health care are universal and continue to have a negative impact in the healthcare system. Health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or in opportunities to achieve optimal health experienced by socially disadvantaged racial, ethnic, and other population groups, and communities. (CDC)

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence in healthcare can be loosely defined as the ability to understand and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own beliefs. The importance of cultural competence in healthcare, specifically regarding a vulnerable population, is imperative in order to be able to provide adequate and non-biased care in respect to the general and cultural needs of the individual.

Vulnerable Populations and Biases

A vulnerable population in healthcare could include but is not limited to patients who are racial or ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals, the underinsured, or those with certain medical conditions. Members of vulnerable populations often have health issues that are impaired by unnecessarily inadequate healthcare and have specific or unique

needs. Biases amongst vulnerable populations have been documented globally by patient race/ethnicity, sex, gender and sexual identity, religion, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and geography, among other characteristics. There have been many biases throughout history regarding the American Indian. I specifically do not have any biases, but do believe that although strides have been made, there are still many issues that need to continue to be addressed.

The American Indian Population

The etiology of health care disparities in the American Indian population includes both policy issues and personal factors. Demographic differences and policy failure that has impaired the health care services for centuries have added to the disparities in healthcare. Initially, the commitment of the government to provide healthcare to the American Indian community was through a series of treaties. As the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) changed from being part of the War Department to the Department of Internal Ministry, the conferred interests of various lobbyists led to the facilitation of poor healthcare policies (Frizzell, 2014). Throughout the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century the BIA worked to meet the goals of the government but with little regard to the healthcare needs of the American Indian community. Not all was abandoned, there were still some people who did work diligently towards the welfare of the American Indian community. (Kunitz, 1996)

Healthcare needs of the American Indian

A unique need of the American Indian is the need for comprehensive and complete healthcare services. The mistrust of the Indian Health Services (IHS) by the American Indian

community has provided special challenges for social workers, clinicians and healthcare providers, including nurses. This stems primarily from the inability to provide comprehensive services due to underfunding. (Warne & Frizzell, 2014)

Patient History

When approaching a patient from the American Indian community, as a healthcare provider, one must pay special attention to their histories and traditions, many will use the services of traditional healers. One should take note, as a healthcare provider that a negative attitude towards a traditional healer may break the communication with the patient. One must also take special care to be cognizant of the habits of the patient such as the use of tobacco and alcohol as well as their family and occupational history.

Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome

Post traumatic-stress disorder is prevalent in the American Indian communities. Mental health disorders are amongst the top 10 reasons for IHS hospitalizations and outpatient visits. (Brave Heart et al., 2016) Much of the community reports trauma in one form or another. The people of the American Indian community are at a higher risk of experiencing trauma than the general population and are twice as likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder. (Bassett, 2012) The history of trauma in the American Indian community, specifically regarding women and children should be noted.

Health Screening

There should be every effort made to promote vaccinations and cancer screenings. Cancer mortality rates for American Indians are among the highest of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. (Clegg et al., 2003) In addition to this, it is also known that the American Indian community population utilizes fewer screening tools and presents with a higher stage of cancer. (Espey et al., 2007)

Social Justice in Healthcare

It could be stated that social justice is the belief that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. Nurses have an ethical and moral obligation to enforce the ethics and values of the medical entity they work for. An example of social justice in health care is to train nurses to have the ability to competently advocate for patients in their care. Nurses must be able to intervene and provide effective, efficient and compassionate care on behalf of their patients. The role of a nurse is to understand all of the distinctions of being a patient. The position of an ethically conscious, socially-just nurse is to honor the promise that he or she has made to uphold the 'Nursing Code of Ethics' through the treatment of each and every patient. (University, 2021).

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