

Vulnerable Populations

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

Vulnerable Populations

Cultural competence is an important component in almost any profession, but it is especially essential in nursing. It can be defined as “a developmental process that builds continuous increases in knowledge and skill development in the areas of cultural awareness, knowledge, understanding, sensitivity, interaction, and skills (Hood, 2018, p. 281). There are many group of people who do not get prioritized in terms of health care due to generalized opinions or stigmas. Having cultural competence allows nurses to provide the best care for patients with various conditions and backgrounds. Factors such as language or communication barriers, economic barriers, or cultural differences can add extra challenges to providing care to individuals that these elements may apply to, so being culturally competent can help prepare a nurse for these situations and help nurses to better serve their patients.

There are many vulnerable populations, but one that I am especially drawn to is the unborn. Many vulnerable populations suffer due to their voices being silenced regarding certain issues. With the unborn however, there is no voice to be heard. Fetuses cannot speak up and advocate for themselves, making them extremely vulnerable to not receiving sufficient care. Throughout gestation, the fetus receives everything from its mother, both good and bad. This means the health of a fetus is directly correlated to the health and wellbeing of the mother. If the mother has poor nutrition habits, this will in turn negatively affect the fetus as well. Another example of how the mother’s choices directly affect her unborn baby is through vaccinations during the pregnancy. “The authors of various publications unanimously suggest that immunization not only protects the mother but also plays a key role in the protection of the fetus and infants until they develop a fully functional immune system” (Dąbek et al., 2021). Unlike an independent adult, these unborn children do not have the ability to decide for themselves whether

or not to get a vaccine or make healthy dietary choices in order to receive the appropriate nutrients to grow and develop. These choices are made for them by the individual carrying them. This also applies to negative elements such as tobacco or alcohol use.

This topic may have stood out to me because of my love for infants and children. I feel I may have always had this standpoint to an extent because I was always very fascinated with babies, but it has become even more enhanced since becoming a mother myself. Since the moment I found out I was expecting, I did everything possible that I thought was beneficial for both my son and I. After he was born and meeting him face-to-face, these instincts to do what is best for him and to protect him have only heightened. I feel because of these feelings that I have, I affiliate other pregnant women to myself when I was pregnant with my son and have a difficult time understanding why someone else may make different choices than I did while expecting.

As nurses, one of the many roles we take on is the role of the teacher. I feel it is our role to properly educate pregnant women of the benefits and importance of taking care of themselves throughout the entire gestation. One study showed that pregnant women were not well-aware about vaccinations during pregnancy, “with many reporting not having received a recommendation to vaccinate from their doctors. Strong trust in health professionals indicate that strengthened recommendations could improve vaccination uptake” (Karafillakis et al., 2021). I believe this is one of the best ways to promote social justice on this issue because you are teaching the client directly on how to improve the situation. Nurses also take on the role of client advocate. This involves speaking on behalf of your client or those who cannot speak up for themselves, such as unborn children. On top of educating patients on the steps they can take to better protect themselves and their unborn children, it is also critical to establish a good

relationship with them so that your word is significant and reliable. By taking these measures, the nurse takes on the role of both teacher and client advocate.

The unborn are vulnerable to receiving lesser healthcare due to their lack of voice to advocate for themselves. Regardless of still being inside the womb, they have needs just like every other human being. These include but are not limited to basics such as adequate nutrients and health care preventative measures like vaccines. I believe it is important for nurses to take on the role of the teacher and client advocate to promote social justice for this particular group by educating pregnant women on steps to take that would be beneficial for both themselves and their unborn children. As nurses, we all have personal biases regarding specific topics or groups. However, identifying and reflecting on these biases will better help us to provide the best care possible to patients of all populations.

References

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