

**N314 Vulnerable Populations: Native Americans**

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N314: Introduction to Professional Nursing

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

According to Hood (2022), culture competence is defined as, “a developmental process that builds continuous increases in knowledge and skill development areas of cultural awareness, knowledge, understanding, sensitivity, interaction and skills” (p. 288). In addition to this definition, Hood (2022) also provides several steps to gaining cultural competency, including steps like examining personal values, beliefs, biases and prejudices; learning culturally-specific communication strategies; and interacting with people from different cultures (p. 288-290). Hood (2022) continues to describe cultural competence, and emphasizes that cultural competence is not simple to attain – it is rather a journey over the lifespan that takes time and continued consideration. Overall, Hood (2022) explains the cultural competence process in depth and later describes the importance of cultural competence in nursing care.

With the United States having the classic distinction of being the world’s “melting pot,” cultural competency is an important and necessary part of nursing care. Hood (2022) explains that as the United States’ population continues to grow and further diversify, providing culturally competent nursing care can help provide better health promotion and disease prevention strategies, as well as help create an atmosphere of trust in the healthcare system. Deering (2022) discusses that cultural competence in nursing also helps foster patient-centered care and shows patients that nurses see them as unique individuals, not just another person to care for. Hood (2022) touches on this same concept as Deering, and explains that practicing culturally competent nursing care requires an, “...attitude of genuine caring toward all humankind...” (p. 304). As Deering (2022) explains, cultural competence allows nurses to effectively treat patients, even when the beliefs, views, and/or values of the patient conflict with accepted practice. This understanding provides patients with more patient-centered care and provides nurses a means to

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provide this improved care. Overall, cultural competence is an important and integral part of modern nursing practice.

Today, there are many special populations in the United States that would be classified as vulnerable populations that require culturally competent care – the elderly, the homeless, and the disabled would be examples of some vulnerable populations. One underrepresented, vulnerable population in the United States is Native Americans/Alaskan natives (NA/AN), also sometimes referred to as American Indians. The National Congress of American Indians (2020) broadly defines NA/ANs as, “the original Indigenous peoples of North America” (p. 18). This population has multiple special healthcare-related needs. According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017), NA/ANs are the economically poorest population in the United States. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) also explains that income is a strong predictor of health outcomes, and that the income disparity NA/ANs face is correlated with the health disparities they experience. According to the Indian Health Service (2019), NA/ANs experience some startling health disparities when compared to other populations within the United States, including higher rates of diabetes mellitus, chronic liver disease, assault, and suicide. The Indian Health Service (2019) also states that NA/ANs have a significantly lower life expectancy than the United States average - NA/AN’s life expectancy is 73 years compared to the United States average of 78.5 years. Along with income disparity, according to Kao (2020), only 17% of Native Americans pursue education post-high school, compared to 60% of people in the United States overall (p. 834). All of the facts stated above are important to consider when providing care to Native American patients. Many in this population may be facing economic obstacles in paying for care, and may have lower health literacy when compared to the average United States citizen. Additionally, they may be experiencing health

issues that disproportionately affect their families and communities. Lastly, Hood (2022) explains that NA/AN cultural and traditional healing practices and ideas are also important to consider.

These cultural practices should always be in mind when providing care to NA/ANs.

Upon personal reflection, I realize that the Native American population is of special consideration as I am from a Native American background myself. I understand that personally being from this population introduces bias into my thinking, and subsequently I may provide special attention to a NA/AN patient if they were under my care. With this bias in mind, it is my hope to provide this “special” care to all my patients. While I may have a special love for NA/ANs and their culture, these feelings will not cloud my judgement when providing care to this population.

With the following information in mind, the last question becomes, “What are the roles of nurses and nursing profession in the promotion of social justice?” Overall, nurses have a large role to play in promoting social justice. According to Timmons (2021), nurses have historically been social justice advocates. For example, Florence Nightingale worked to improve hospital conditions, Lillian Ward and Mary Brewster advocated for public health, and Massey Riddle fought against discriminatory policies in nursing schools (Timmons, 2021). Timmons (2021) further explains that nurses interact closely with patients from all backgrounds, and are guided by core ethical principles. This provides nurses with the basis to advocate for the equal treatment of their patients, both inside hospital walls and outside in society (Timmons, 2021). It is important for nurses to continue in the profession’s historical pursuit of social justice, and modify their pursuits to meet modern-day needs.

In conclusion, cultural competency is an integral part of nursing care, and it will continue to be an important aspect of modern nursing practice. As Hood (2022) described, applying the

ideas of cultural competency to all cultures and populations, like NA/ANs, will allow all cultures to trust in the healthcare system, providing for better disease prevention and health outcomes.

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