

**Vulnerable populations**

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N314: Introduction to Professional Nursing

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10/10/2023

## **Vulnerable populations**

Cultural competence is an important foundation for a nurse to give the best care possible to all people of different beliefs and cultures. There are many ways to define the term cultural competence, but all are similar in defining it as the ability of the nurse to provide patients from all different cultures with effective and safe high-quality care and to include the patient's cultural choices in their plan of care (Sharifi et al., 2019). Cultural competence is not just an important foundation for nurses but for all those who work in healthcare.

### **Defining attributes of cultural competence**

According to Sharifi et al. (2019), six defining attributes of cultural competence help nurses to understand the term more specifically. The first attribute is cultural awareness, which refers to understanding how one's culture can create biases/prejudices and influence how one sees other cultures. This helps the nurse understand their biases against certain cultures or groups and how those biases can impact their patient's care. The second attribute is cultural knowledge, one's understanding of different cultures. Nurses must combine their understanding of cultures and their healthcare knowledge to help them better understand their patient's decisions and actions. The third attribute is cultural sensitivity, which refers to respecting and valuing different cultures and, in turn, respecting and valuing the patient's decisions and actions based on their culture. The fourth attribute is cultural skill, the ability to communicate effectively with patients of different cultures. The fifth attribute is cultural proficiency, continually educating oneself on different cultures and sharing that knowledge with others who may not be as educated on these cultures. The final attribute is dynamicity, which refers to the nurses' constant interactions with different cultures, helping them become culturally competent (Sharifi et al., 2019).

## **Importance of cultural competence**

Becoming a nurse who is culturally competent to all different cultures and groups of people is significant in healthcare. It allows nurses to establish trust and respect with their patients more easily. It also gives the patient a sense of comfort and a feeling that they are being heard, especially when they are in a new environment. Cultural competence also reduces the risk of inefficient, low-quality care and allows all patients to feel comfortable about coming and receiving care from the facility and staff. A specific group that could benefit from cultural competence is those who belong to one of the many vulnerable populations: individuals experiencing homelessness.

## **Homelessness**

The number of individuals who are experiencing homelessness has grown to millions. In the United States alone, more than 2.5 million people are homeless (Jego et al., 2018). Individuals who are experiencing homelessness include those who do not have a stable and permanent housing situation and/or are unable to get it. Because of this, homeless individuals have poor physical and mental health, increasing their mortality rate compared to those fortunate to have housing (Pottie et al., 2020). These individuals suffer from chronic conditions and disease, mental disorders, and substance abuse. According to Jego et al. (2018), the rate of homeless individuals with mental disorders rose from 30% to 60%, and over 50% of them have problems with substance abuse. Although this group of individuals has a higher need for healthcare, the accessibility for them is challenging. Several factors prevent them from seeking/obtaining healthcare, such as having no health insurance, prioritizing other needs before their health, like food and shelter, distrust of the medical system, and fear of being turned away

due to discrimination (Pottie et al., 2020). Because of these factors, these individuals usually seek help when their health has become severely affected or do not seek help.

### **Personal beliefs**

People experiencing homelessness need primary care and interventions/programs to help their living situation, mental health, and substance abuse. If there were better programs in place, perhaps the millions who are homeless could manage to bring themselves out of homelessness or not be afraid to get the help they need. As a future nurse, I believe delivering care to the homeless population is something that should be done. Nurses promise to provide the best care to all individuals in need, and this should not exclude these individuals. I used to have a bias against those who were homeless, thinking that they were all individuals who were addicted to drugs and were in their situation because of that choice. However, as I have gotten older and experienced more in the world and healthcare, I realize that one cannot judge another when you do not even know who they are or what they have gone through. There can be many reasons these individuals have substance abuse, and it is not fair to judge or deny them anything because of that. All healthcare workers must understand and apply cultural competence to their practice. They need to set aside any biases against a certain culture or population of individuals and provide them with the care they deserve.

## References

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