

Health Care Amongst the Homeless Population

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In the United States, thousands of people are living on the streets with no food or shelter. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2018), “a total of 552,830 people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2018... 67% of those homeless are individuals, and 33% are people in families with children.” Each state differs in the total number of homelessness and varies amongst race and ethnicity. As the rate of homelessness increases, the probability of those individuals seeking proper health care is not likely. It is essential to be aware of the different vulnerable populations one may encounter while working in the health care industry.

Burchum (2002) defined cultural competence as a developmental process that builds a continuous increase in knowledge and skill development in the areas of cultural awareness, knowledge, understanding, sensitivity, interaction, and skills. To ensure all patients are receiving equal treatment regardless of their cultural practices, Mcenroe-Petitte (2020) states building trust and accepting an individual’s situation is essential when it comes to providing individualized care. Learning specific communication strategies when working with different cultures is beneficial when providing care for others. Properly communicating and empathizing with patients enables them to trust the health care provider and enhance their healing process.

The homeless population is increasing every year, and without proper health care, those individuals are inclined to have chronic illnesses associated with behavioral health issues, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (Mcenroe-Petitte, 2020). With no financial stability, no shelter, and difficulty receiving medical care, homeless people often disregard their health and allow those illnesses to advance. According to McLeod (2018), a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs can be used to determine what

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requirements are needed before attending to needs higher in up in the hierarchy. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs includes factors such as physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Since health care might not be a priority for the less fortunate, they may prioritize their survival and safety needs first and whenever possible, move up on the hierarchy pyramid. With limited resources available, the best method of care for this vulnerable population is education and teaching them the importance of preventative health care. Preventative health care will equip them with knowledge on how to protect themselves from environmental factors and acute conditions.

I believe health care is a privilege in the United States because we have the luxury of getting the care we need when we need it. When referring to the homeless population, I believe everyone in need of health care, should be cared for regardless of their economic or social standing. Although the vulnerable population has limited resources and does not have funds for proper health care, many individuals who get admitted to hospitals or clinics have reported having an alcohol or substance abuse addiction (Zlotnick et al., 2013). Their action causes a bias judgment for me as a health care provider when providing care for these patients because of their poor decision choices. If the homeless were responsible and utilized their limited resources appropriately, they would not be prone to substance abuse and alcoholism- they may even have a better lifestyle. Although I have my bias and judgments about individuals who make poor decisions, I will continue to empathize with others and provide genuine care because all lives deserve respect and dignity. When delivering care to homeless/impoverished populations, I take it upon myself to provide equality care to all my patients regardless of what led them to the facility. I will continue to hold myself accountable for all of my patient's care during their healing process.

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As a nurse, understanding the importance of cultural competence is needed in the health care industry. Nurses must be able to empathize with patients and help them acquire optimal health regardless of their background, cultural practices, and lifestyle. The homeless population is limited to health care resources; therefore, educating those patients on preventative health care will be beneficial to them in the future. As a nurse, understanding one's values and beliefs will provide the basis for successful nursing care.

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