



POSITION STATEMENT

MITIGATING IMPLICIT BIAS TO REDUCE DISPARITIES IN PATIENT OUTCOME

The purpose of this statement is to explore implicit bias and the role it plays in healthcare disparities and to identify what nurses can do to encourage equality of care for all patients.

BACKGROUND

Our United States Declaration of Independence assures equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as fundamental rights for all (Jefferson, 1776), yet there is nothing in the document that promises healthcare as a right for all citizens. For this and other reasons, healthcare imbalances and disadvantages are present in our country. Citizens with steady incomes, better health insurance, healthy food, clean water and greater access to care often experience better healthcare opportunities than citizens with less money, lesser or no health insurance coverage, inadequate food and water resources and less access to care (Probst, et. al, 2020; Opper, et al, 2020) . Healthcare disparities have been defined by Healthy People 2020 as “a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage” (ODPHP). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare disparities have become more obvious.

Citizens of color are even at a greater risk for healthcare disparities. While African American citizens made up 14% of Michigan’s population, they accounted for 35% of the COVID-19 cases by July 2020 and were noted to be four times more likely to die a COVID-19 related death than their Caucasian counterparts ([Michigan.gov](https://www.michigan.gov)). Several studies have shown that implicit bias by healthcare providers is associated with lower quality of care (FitzGerald & Hurst, 2020).

Healthcare disparities such as these sparked Michigan’s governor, Gretchen Whitmer, to form a task force to advise her on strategies to eliminate these racial disparities. One recommendation is to mandate healthcare providers to participate in implicit bias training as a condition of relicensure in an effort to eliminate discrimination against all citizens, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (executive order 2020). ANA-MI strongly supports Governor Whitmer’s stance on eradication of racism and healthcare disparities.

The mission statement which drives the American Nurses Association is to “Lead the profession to shape the future of nursing and health care.” As nurses, it is up to us to facilitate increased opportunities for those experiencing disparities in healthcare due to bias. It is up to us to help even the playing field and to progress toward full equality in healthcare.

IMPLICIT BIAS

Implicit bias, also known as unconscious bias, as been defined as “thoughts and feelings that, by definition, often exist outside of conscious awareness, and therefore are difficult to control,” (Hall, Implicit Racial/Ethnic Bias Among Health Care Professionals and Its Influence on Health Care Outcomes: A Systematic Review, 105 AM. J. PUBLIC HEALTH 2588 (Dec. 2015). Furthermore, implicit bias includes any preconceived thoughts that can result in disparities and it is the duty of the healthcare provider to become aware of our own biases to help embrace the changes needed to eliminate healthcare disparities (ANA, 2018; Fitzgerald & Hurst, 2016). It has been noted when people experience discrimination based on personal characteristics, it can impact their physical and psychological health (Sutin, Stephan & Terracciano, 2016). Racism has been described as a public health crisis which affects the mental as well as physical health of all people (ANA, 2018). In the past, the ANA has also taken the position there should be no discrimination in nursing practice nor in health care and that all patients should be viewed as equal and nurses should be treat them with impartiality, respect, and civility (2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Strategies to mitigate implicit bias include building upon previous work of the ANA- Michigan (2018) based on opposing all racism and discrimination and being an advocate for all patients, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

- Acknowledge that implicit biases do exist and becoming aware these biases can result in disparities in health outcomes associated with many demographic factors. (As nurses it is imperative to be aware of demographic factors which can undermine our patient’s success for health.



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Some of these factors might include questioning if there are safe living situations, availability for safe places to walk, feasibility of obtaining fresh produce and other healthy food choices, and obtaining fresh clean water for drinking.)

- Follow the Nursing Code of Ethics, which advises nurses to band together as patient advocates against racism, discrimination and injustice.
- Participate in the required implicit bias training. While this will be a part of the next license renewal, it will also expand knowledge on this subject.
- Assume the responsibility for recognizing your own implicit biases.
- Commit to treat all patients equally regardless of their race, ethnicity, economic status, sexual identity, or gender.
- Become an advocate for all patients, for issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

As nurses it is our duty to uphold the values and mission of the ANA-Michigan by treating all patients equally and fairly.

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