



Mentoring for cultural awareness

Make a commitment to self-awareness.

ACCORDING to the American Nurses Association (ANA) definition, mentoring is a one-to-one, long-term relationship between a novice and an experienced nurse that promotes support during transitions, advocates teaching and learning, and helps build coping skills within a safe environment conducive to sharing and discovery.

Mentoring has always been integral to nursing education and development, but the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we build and foster professional development through mentoring. I've noticed its impact in three ways:

- Our need to network and interact with colleagues to offset feelings of isolation and loneliness has never been greater.
- The need for nursing mentors is heightened by rapidly changing clinical care protocols and procedures.
- The social unrest we're experiencing is driving a need not only for professional mentoring, but also for cultural awareness mentoring.

Mentoring to help each other understand and recognize unconscious bias is among some important first steps. Unconscious bias is a prejudice we have or an assumption we make about another person based on common cultural stereotypes, rather than thoughtful judgment. No person or organization is immune from it. The nursing profession needs to take advantage of traditional and virtual avenues of interaction to enhance how nurses interact across all populations.

How do we begin? We currently have a deficit of mentors, especially those who can help us understand the nurse's role in addressing discrimination (see ANA's resolution on racial justice for communities of color at nursingworld.org/news/news-releases/2020/ana-calls-for-racial-justice-for-communities-of-color). In my conversations with nurses and other clinicians, they all support the imperative to speak up against racism, discrimination, and injustice, but the dialog necessarily

moves to how. How should my words, my actions, my behaviors, my approach to care change so I'm more culturally aware? How should my interactions with other nurses and caregivers change? We're talking better awareness and actionable behaviors here, not generalizations. That's important because awareness and willingness to be the mentee are key. So how can each individual nurse or team of nurses get the mentoring and role modeling they need to improve?

An attorney and certified ethics expert on our team suggested we start with understanding unconscious bias. Like many approaches, one size doesn't fit all. Each person's learning style and willingness to engage in self-reflection must be considered. Illustrating what's at stake and how it benefits all of us is essential to promoting human dignity and strengthening nursing's core values. That's why finding and developing mentors who can help achieve these goals is so important to the profession and to our future. We may all agree with what needs to happen and why, but the hard part is knowing how and by whom. One qualified mentor could provide mentoring and care consultation for several nurses at a time in different geographic locations or within an entire organization.

I've committed to increasing my own level of self-awareness, learning more about microaggression, and discussing bias and disparities in nursing. Yes, it begins with me and you, determined to make a difference in a fractured world. Healing patients with fractures seems easy compared to this task. Yet we know it can be done because the sheer size of the nursing workforce is a powerful tipping point. Building cultural awareness through mentoring is a smart start.

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To view a list of references, visit myamericannurse.com/?p=69299.

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