Making the Case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Nursing Education

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are critical concepts within the realm of nursing education. Although not unique to the nursing education environment, DEI efforts play a significant role in the development of nurses' knowledge to increase their ability to address health disparities and inequities.

The Business Case for Diversity

For over 25 years since the publication of Workforce 2000 by the Department of Education, there has been evidence which supports the importance of having a diverse workforce. Simply put, diverse workplaces are more profitable and successful than homogenous ones. According to a McKinsey report, companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. Additionally, companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. While increasing diversity brings financial results, more importantly to healthcare organizations, it has shown to improve the quality of population health and care for all people. (Gomez et al., 2019).

Supportive evidence shows that diverse teams bring diverse perspectives and ideas, which can lead to more creative problem-solving and innovation (Hunt et al., 2015). Additionally, diverse teams see through different cultural lenses to better understand, engage with, and serve the diverse population in the United States. In nursing education and practice, this translates to improved population health that addresses the social determinants of health, patient satisfaction, adherence to care, and quality outcomes (Raghu et al., 2021).

The Fairness Case for Diversity

While the business case for diversity is compelling, there is also a fairness case for diversity. Most agree that it is simply the right thing to do to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities regardless of their race, gender, or any other characteristic. Unfortunately, there are still many barriers to diversity in the workplace and education. These include unconscious biases, lack of representation, and systemic discrimination. By promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, we can begin the challenging work of breaking down these barriers to create a more fair and just society.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Nursing Education

In nursing education, DEI is particularly important because nurses are on the front lines of healthcare and frequently interact with patients from diverse backgrounds. To provide the best health care possible, nurses must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to understand and address the unique and complex needs of people who represent the full definition of diversity.

In order to promote DEI in nursing education we must ensure that the nursing workforce reflects the diversity of the patient population. This begins with an organizational commitment to intentionally diversify the educational environment. Once support is demonstrated philosophically and in practice, effort must be spent recruiting, admitting, and retaining students from diverse backgrounds and providing them with the support they need to succeed (Rosenberg et al. 2011).

Another important aspect of DEI in nursing education is cultural competence (de leon Siantz, 2008). Cultural competence refers to the ability of individuals or organizations to effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, including understanding and appreciating cultural differences, being aware of one's own biases and values, and adapting to and respecting cultural practices that may be different from one's own. This involves a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable individuals and organizations to effectively engage with and serve diverse populations, while also recognizing and addressing systemic barriers and disparities that may exist based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other factors (Betancourt et. al., 2003). In addition to promoting cultural competence, nursing education programs must also incorporate DEI into their curriculum by including courses on topics such as social justice, health disparities, and the intersection of race, ethnicity, and health. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is beneficial for educational environments and healthcare organizations in their endeavors toward equity, financial sustainability, and successful health outcomes. By breaking down barriers and promoting cultural competence, we can create a more fair and just society, while improving the quality of care for all patients. As we continue to navigate a rapidly changing world, it is more important than ever to prioritize DEI in all aspects of our lives.

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