

The Transformative Power of Research in Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Nurse's Perspective

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With the current trends in healthcare in the US, there is a growing number of immigrant communities, including people of Asian, Hispanic, and African origin. It is also projected that about 50% of the US population will be made up of perceived minority groups by 2050 (Nair & Adetayo, 2019). With such staggering figures, aligning healthcare delivery with cultural diversity, inclusivity, and competence is essential. Despite this trend and strides towards inclusivity, studies have shown that significant racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare still exist and hinder the timely delivery of quality care (Caraballo et al., 2022). A study by Gwanmesia in 2017 also shed some light on this issue through the lens of nursing education. The researcher evaluated the cultural competence levels of senior and junior baccalaureate nursing students in historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) environments; there was no significant difference in the cultural competence levels between the two groups. They also noted that most participants wanted to learn more about cultural competence. This highlights an essential gap in the journey towards inclusivity and diversity through nursing education and research, with the apparent need to integrate this crucial topic into the curriculum.

To foster inclusivity at the workplace and

in the community, an organization needs to beware of assumptions and stereotypes, ensure inclusivity in physical space, advocate for inclusivity, self-educate on diversity, develop institutional and individual commitments and adopt a strength-based approach (Marjadi et al., 2023). This article explores the transformative role of nursing research in advancing DEI, shedding light on nurses'

unique perspectives on this critical aspect of healthcare.

The Significance of DEI in Nursing

While the diversity of the nursing workforce is commendable, DEI in nursing truly shines when translated into culturally competent and equitable care for all patients. Goode and Landefeld (2018) highlighted this crucial shift and emphasized the need for nurses to reflect on their communities and possess the skills and knowledge to deliver sensitive, effective care regardless of patients' backgrounds.

The benefits of DEI extend beyond representation, impacting the very core of healthcare. Gomez and Bernet (2019) have shown that patient outcomes improve when cared for by diverse teams. This improvement can stem from better communication, shared cultural understanding, and a more holistic approach to healthcare needs. Nurses from diverse backgrounds bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table, often leading to innovative solutions and more effective patient-centered care.

Nurses stand at the intersection of patients and healthcare systems, witnessing firsthand the impact of strong and weak DEI practices. This unique position, as highlighted in Flaubert et al.'s (2021) research, makes

their voices and perspectives invaluable in research and policy development. Nurses can shed light on the nuances of culturally competent care, diverse patient populations' challenges, and the tangible difference DEI initiatives can make in real-world settings.

Remember, the significance of DEI in nursing goes beyond statistics and data. It is about building trust, reducing disparities, and fostering a healthcare system that reflects the rich tapestry of human experience. It is about ensuring that every patient receives the highest quality care regardless of their background and feels seen, heard, and respected.

The Role of Nursing Research in Advancing DEI

While diverse faces grace the hallways of hospitals, ensuring inclusivity and cultural competency goes beyond simple representation. To truly advance DEI in nursing, we must dive deeper, utilizing the transformative power of research to cultivate a landscape of healing that embraces differences and elevates care for all. Several strategies can be employed to enhance diversity and inclusivity in nursing through research.

Planting the Seeds of Change:

At the root of this transformation lies fostering a diverse research landscape itself. Graduate programs can lead the way by nurturing the growth of future scholars through scholarships, tailored support systems, and even fixed intake quotas specifically for underrepresented communities. This strategic investment will yield a richer harvest of culturally diverse researchers better equipped to understand and address the unique needs of minority communities.

Weaving Knowledge into the Fabric of Education:

Nursing education is the fertile ground

where these seeds of change take root. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing underscores the importance of weaving inclusivity into the very fabric of educational environments (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2017). Integrating DEI topics into the mainstream curriculum empowers future nurses with the knowledge and empathy needed to navigate a multicultural world. Imagine classrooms buzzing with lively discussions on cultural competence, healthcare disparities, and the ethical implications of unconscious bias.

Bridging the Divide: Research in Action:

Nursing research is not merely an academic pursuit; it is a bridge connecting knowledge to real-world impact. Imagine pioneering studies that delve into the social determinants of health affecting specific communities, leading to culturally tailored interventions that bridge healthcare gaps. Studies analyzing implicit bias in clinical decision-making paving the way for fairer and more equitable treatment across diverse patient populations. This is the transformative power of research in action, informing policies, shaping practices, and ultimately saving lives.

Beyond Quotas: A Holistic Approach:

Advancement requires looking beyond numbers alone. Diversity cannot be simply recruited; it needs to be nurtured. That is why fostering DEI principles within healthcare organizations becomes crucial. Imagine recruitment processes that value and actively seek culturally diverse candidates, resulting in a workforce that mirrors the communities it serves. Workplace training programs that delve into unconscious bias and cultural sensitivity create an environment where inclusivity thrives.

Collaboration is the Key:

This intricate tapestry of change cannot be woven by one hand alone. Researchers, educators, and practitioners must join forces, their unique threads intertwining to create

a more vibrant and inclusive healthcare landscape. Imagine collaborative research projects where community voices guide the inquiry, leading to interventions co-designed with the very populations they aim to empower. This shared ownership paves the way for sustainable, impactful change.

Investing in the Future:

To ensure this tapestry continues to flourish, we must invest in its future. Dedicated funding streams for DEI research are essential, nurturing the talents of emerging scholars and championing groundbreaking projects. Advocacy efforts must resonate in the halls of power, urging policymakers and healthcare leaders to prioritize DEI initiatives. Nurses, empowered by knowledge and research, can become vocal advocates, pushing for inclusivity in every realm of the profession.

Challenges and Opportunities

While strides have been made in advancing DEI research within nursing, significant challenges remain. Overcoming these hurdles requires acknowledging the limitations and harnessing them as opportunities for growth and collaboration.

Challenges that Demand Creative Solutions

Limited Resources: Funding constraints often restrict the scope and impact of DEI research projects. Securing dedicated funding streams specifically for DEI initiatives and fostering partnerships with community organizations and private donors can open doors for more comprehensive and impactful research.

Time Constraints: Balancing clinical responsibilities with research demands can overwhelm nurses. Exploring innovative research methods like mixed methodologies, leveraging data collection and analysis technology, and providing nurses with dedicated research leave or protected time can alleviate these pressures.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration Gap: Complex DEI issues in healthcare often

require expertise beyond the purview of nursing alone. Building strong partnerships with scholars from social sciences, public health, and other relevant disciplines can foster novel research angles and lead to more effective interventions.

Transforming Challenges into Opportunities

Leveraging Technology: Advancements in technology, such as telehealth and artificial intelligence, can be harnessed to collect data from diverse populations, analyze complex datasets, and facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration even in geographically dispersed settings.

Community Engagement: Community involvement in research design, implementation, and dissemination can lead to more culturally relevant and impactful findings. Community-based participatory research approaches can bridge the gap between research and real-world application.

Storytelling and Narrative-Based Research: Incorporating qualitative methods like storytelling and narrative analysis can provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of diverse populations.

Conclusion

While the path toward a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive healthcare system is paved with challenges, the transformative power of nursing research illuminates the way. Nurses cannot undertake this journey alone. Researchers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers must join hands, fueled by evidence and propelled by unwavering commitment. Let us weave a tapestry of inclusivity, thread by thread, until every patient receives the care they deserve, not in the echo of disparity but in the symphony of belonging. ■

References online
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