

Diversity in Nursing Education: Talking Points



What are the issues in diversity and nursing?

- Racial and ethnic minorities are under-represented in all health professions including nursing. ⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ There are also significant disparities in the burden of illness among the US population. ^(1-3, 5, 6)
- **These two facts are linked:** one of the factors producing health disparities is a healthcare workforce that doesn't reflect the population; a more representative healthcare workforce can help reduce health disparities ^(1, 2, 7)
- In addition, the under-representation of minorities in nursing is inconsistent with our professional values. ^(8, 9) A more diverse workforce and a more inclusive work environment benefit all of us, not just minority persons.

Examples of health disparities: ⁽⁴⁾

- Mortality from heart disease is 29% higher in African American adults than among white adults; mortality from stroke is 40% higher.
- American Indians and Alaska Native are 2.6 times more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than non-Hispanic whites; Hispanics are 1.9 times more likely.
- Among African Americans, American Indians, and mainland Puerto Ricans, infant mortality rates are significantly higher than for white infants, even when controlling for insurance and access to prenatal care. In 2000, for example, the black-white ratio was 2.5, up from 2.4 in 1998.
- In 2002, 50 percent of those infected with Hepatitis B were Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, although this group comprises less than 5% of the total US population.

Examples of workforce disparities ⁽³⁾:

- African Americans are 12.2% of the US population, 3.4% of the Washington State population, and less than 1% of Washington's RN population.
- Hispanics are nearly 14% of the US population, nearly 9% of the Washington State population, and only 2% of the Washington RN population.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives are approximately 0.7% of the US population, 1.4% in Washington State, and approximately 0.4% of Washington RNs.

Why does this problem exist? Why isn't there more diversity in nursing?

- Minority students have lower rates of entry into and higher rates of attrition (exit without completion) from health-professions programs than White students. ^(6-7, 10-12)
- Reasons for this include: legacies of discrimination and prejudice, inadequate academic preparation, economic challenges, lack of support/ misunderstanding from faculty and other students, lack of cultural awareness among faculty and staff, poor career advice in middle and high school, and mixed messages from family and community. ^(6-7, 10-12)

What should we do?

There are two strategies: enhanced recruitment and retention of both students and faculty. Neither alone is sufficient. Preliminary review of successful efforts suggests the following key elements:

- **Recruitment:**
 - Outreach to and collaboration with minority communities ⁽¹⁾
 - Dedicated program staff for consistency, knowledge, and trust ⁽²⁾
 - Assistance with the application process such as “navigator” services and scholarships for application fees ⁽⁶⁾

- **Retention**
 - Dedicated staff within nursing programs for service coordination and advocacy ¹⁰
 - Identification of high-potential individuals who are also at high risk for not completing their nursing program ⁽¹¹⁾
 - Provision of “wrap-around” services, including:
 - Financial aid: grants, scholarships, work-study, and “pay-back” loans
 - Social support: mentoring, role models, childcare, etc.
 - Academic support: tutoring, pre-matriculation enrichment programs, and peer study sessions ⁽¹²⁾

- **Faculty:**
 - Improving recruitment and retention of minority nursing faculty is also crucial for student success, and for building a more diverse and representative of nursing. ⁽¹³⁾

What are we doing here in Washington?

The WCN Master Plan for Nursing Education (MPNE) calls for identifying and disseminating the most successful elements from Washington, from other states, and from other professions as a statewide model, with a broad common core and adaptations to local needs and resources. The MPNE recommends that these evidence-based elements be adopted by all nursing education programs in the State.

The WCN Board has directed that increasing ethnic and racial diversity in nursing education be a consistent thread throughout the implementation of all areas of work. Specific action steps include:

- developing effective and sustainable initiatives that provide financial support to minority nursing students
- developing strategic alliances with minority nursing organizations
- implementing mentoring programs and statewide networks for minority faculty
- organizing a statewide summit and/or a series of workshops on diversity in nursing and nursing education.

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