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Is Implicit Bias Unhealthy?

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IMPLICIT BIAS IN HEALTH CARE

Case Studies and Discussion
Questions

Questions for Discussion

- What do you see? What is going on...?
- What assumptions do you think the health care provider has about the patient?
- What might the patient be feeling? What is his/her/their perception? And how would this influence his/her/their healthcare?
- What needs to change? Is there anything you would do or say differently?
- What can we do to make the experience better for the patient?

ROBERT

Robert is a 14-year old male with a history of suicidal thoughts and outbursts. He was admitted to the child psych unit for further evaluation. Robert is reserved and has said very little about the incident.

Assessment:

- You begin a conversation with Robert and he asks you about having sex. Through the conversation he tells you his best friend and he have been having oral sex for the past month. He is worried that everyone will know this and think that he is a 'faggot.'
- *How do you respond to Robert? Think of at least three things that you could say that would be supportive of Robert and encourage him to be open with you.*

Family Support Group: Robert's parents, Glen and Maria, mention that they suspected that Robert was exploring his sexuality. Maria has found a variety of explicit sexual magazines and because some of them were photos of two men she wondered if Robert might be gay. Glen was silent throughout the entire therapy session. On leaving the session, Maria asks you how she can learn more about homosexuality.

How do you respond to her? What resources are available in your community for her?

Counseling Family:

Glen was silent through most of the exchanges and encounters with Robert. Today he has come alone to visit his son. You encounter both in the day room, neither one talking with each other. Robert says he wants to go to his room and gets up to leave. Robert's father remains seated and turns to you with tears in his eyes, "I just don't understand him. He won't even talk to me. I can't figure out a way to tell him I don't care if he is gay."

How do you respond to him? Suggest at least two ways that he could tell his son that he loves him.

MARY

Mary is a 5'4", 180 lb., 45 year old Black woman. She is married and works part-time. Her blood pressure is 180/90 (this is quite high). Her medical chart states that she is "noncompliant with medications". The health care provider is responsible for counseling her for weight loss and a low sodium diet.

Her white health care provider knows that high blood pressure and overweight are common issues for Black patients, and assumes that there is a genetic cause for her high blood pressure. Since she is "noncompliant with medications" and overweight, the provider also decides that Mary is lazy or uncaring about her health and is unlikely to respond to diet counseling. The provider gives her handouts about low sodium foods and portion control and a brief lecture on being more responsible in following her doctor's instructions

How Mary sees it:

- My health care providers have not explained how my medications work to control my blood pressure, or what my weight and sodium intake have to do with my blood pressure.
 - I live in a low-income neighborhood that has plenty of fast-food outlets, but no supermarket.
 - Our family has one car, used by my husband to get to and from work--shopping is hard without a car.
 - I have medical benefits only through my husband's employer, who cancelled the family's prescription benefit one year ago. I've been taking my expensive blood pressure medicines every other day because we can't afford to pay for them and still have enough money for food and housing.
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- What biases can you identify in the health care provider's assumptions and behaviors?
 - What questions should the health care provider be asking to find out the actual reasons for Mary's "noncompliance"?
 - What do you think about the quality and equity of the health care Mary is receiving?

Luisa

Luisa is a 17 year old Hispanic patient in Labor and Delivery. She is not progressing in labor and a decision is made by her Obstetrician that she needs to have a Cesarean Birth. Labor and Delivery is extremely busy and a RN and the Obstetrician bring in the standard surgical consent form, hands Luisa a pen, and insists the patient signs it. Luisa and her family are clearly uncomfortable. The RN and Obstetrician role their eyes and state “We are very busy!”

What biases can you identify in the health care provider’s assumptions and behaviors?

- What questions should the Obstetrician be asking to find out the reasons that Luisa is reluctant to sign the consent form?
- What do you think about the RN and Obstetrician’s non verbal cues?

Luisa said “My English is not that good. I do not know what is going.” “I need my family to help me make a decision.” The RN and Obstetrician respond, “Why does your family have to help you make the decision?” “Does one of your family members understand English? Can they help translate”?

What do you think of the response from the health care team to Luisa?

What resources are available for Luisa at this time?