

# **Combating Microaggressions Against Nurses of Color in Healthcare**

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# From My Perspective...

- Important to explore prejudice, discrimination, racism, and microaggression in nursing and healthcare
- The experiences and the way they are handled can negatively impact the physical health and mental well-being of nurses and hinder the achievement of a healthy workplace
- Research suggests that these interactions influence workers' relationships with patients or residents, job quality, retention, and psychological well-being

# Why I'm Speaking on This Topic

- I'm privileged
  - Solidly middle class
  - Well educated
  - White



# Why I'm Speaking, Continued

- Patient request for different nurse based on nurse's color (2003)
- Has resulted in my learning and evolution
- Given the historical context of race in the United States and the increasing racial and ethnic tensions, this topic is critically important

# Audience Feedback

## What Would You Do?

- Pull out your smart phone, tablet or laptop
- Join at [www.kahoot.it](http://www.kahoot.it) or with the Kahoot! app
- Enter Game PIN

<https://play.kahoot.it/v2/lobby?quizId=87aee029-8bac-4ef0-a227-6183642e7a09>

# What Would You Do?

A patient requests a different nurse based on the nurse's color. How would you handle this request?

- A. Adjust the assignment
- B. Suggest that the nurse request new assignment
- C. Call your supervisor

# What Did We Do?

- Charge nurse notified nursing supervisor
- Nursing supervisor notified CEO
- CEO visited patient
  - “We hire nurses based on their competencies, not based on the color of their skin.”
  - “If you are not comfortable with our healthcare providers, we can arrange for you to be transferred to another facility”

# Audience Feedback: How Would This Make You Feel?

- Pull out your smart phone tablet or laptop
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- Enter Game PIN
- <https://play.kahoot.it/v2/lobby?quizId=75928a58-ac98-4950-beda-fff3d96b9683>

# How Would This Make You Feel?

If you were the Black nurse, how would this make you feel?

- A. Devalued
- B. Humiliated
- C. Marginalized
- D. All of the Above and More

# What Could We Have Done Better?

- We could have helped the nurse process the feelings she may have experienced

harassed devalued  
MARGINALIZED HUMILIATED  
discrimination

# Policy

- Not just written
- Well known by administration, nurses, physicians, other staff & patients
- Included in charge nurse training
- Discussed with every newly hired nurse and patient care tech
  - Responses
    - Supportive
    - Delighted
    - Surprised
    - “Respected as a professional nurse”

# How Did I Identify My Knowledge Gaps?

- Presented at a Transcultural Nursing Society conference
- Input from Black nurses at the conference
  - This happens all the time
  - If the patient doesn't want me to care for her, I don't want to care for her
- Novel for Book Club
  - Jodi Picoult (2016) *Small Great Things*

# Rethink My Approach

- Cultural humility
  - Realized I didn't know as much as I thought I did
  - Definition
    - Ongoing process of self-exploration and self-critique combined with a willingness to learn from others
    - Entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs, and values
- Critical inquiry
  - Definition
    - Process of gathering and evaluating information, ideas, and assumptions from multiple perspectives to produce well-reasoned analysis and understanding, and leading to new ideas, applications and questions

# Literature Review

- Extensive search in CINAHL, Medline, Cochrane, JBI, and Google Scholar Databases
- Preliminary search in the HeinOnline Government, Politics and Law Database



Thank you to my sister, Helen Morgan JD

# Definitions

- Prejudice - unreasonable feelings, opinions, or attitudes, especially of a hostile nature, regarding an ethnic, racial, social, or religious group
- Discrimination – unjust or prejudicial treatment against a person based on the group, class, or category to which that person belongs rather than on individual merit

# Definitions

- Racism – prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior and has the right to dominate others or that a particular racial group is inferior to others

# Racism

"In America, racism is our oldest curse."

(Bill Clinton & James Patterson, 2018, *The President is Missing*)

"As long as the Negro is humble and submissive, he is approved by the majority group, but when he demands his rights, he is regarded by many as arrogant and a troublemaker."

Jackie Robinson

Colin Kaepernick, former professional football quarterback & political activist, best known for kneeling during the national anthem in protest of police brutality and racism against African Americans



# Microaggression

- Verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities
- May be subtle
- Are offensive
- Directed at a minority or other non-dominant group
- May be intentional or unintentional
- Reinforces a stereotype
- The act of discriminating against a non-dominant group by means of comments or actions

# Literature Review Themes

- Racism and microaggression by patients and family member against nurses and nursing assistants have been documented in
  - Acute care
  - Assisted living
  - Home care
  - Long-term settings
- Issues have been described internationally
- Most of the legal cases in the U.S. are coming up in federal court, primarily under the federal Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 1981)

# Litigation

Year	Case (State)	Background and Outcome
2018	Six CNAs v Providence Christian Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center (MI)	Six CNAs filed a claim of race discrimination alleging that the medical center allowed numerous patients to choose their caregiver by race over the last several years. In some cases, the request was included on the patient's care plan. No outcome.
2018	Williams v. Beaumont Hospital, Dearborn (MI)	Teoka Williams, RN filed a claim of race discrimination. She claimed that she was told by a supervisor a patient did not want Black caregivers or nurses and the patient's request was granted. RN overheard the patient tell someone on the telephone "I do not want that black bitch taking care of me" and reported this to her supervisor, The RN also alleges that she told the human resources department about the incident and was told "patient requests are honored all the time and that the next time it happened she would be taken off the assignment altogether." Beaumont filed a motion for summary judgement, arguing the RN failed to present sufficient evidence of both intentional discrimination and damages. U.S. District Judge denied motion for summary judgement and the case will be heard by a jury.

# Litigation, Continued

2017	Acklen v. Spectrum Health System (MI)	RN filed a claim of race discrimination. The nurse claimed that she was told by a supervisor that a patient no longer wanted Black caregivers or nurses and the patient's request was granted. No outcome.
2015	Crane v. Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital (MI)	RN filed a claim of race discrimination. She alleged that she was told not to provide care for a patient because of her color. The judge ruled in favor of the defendant. The plaintiff filed a petition for review by the Supreme Court, which the court denied in 2016
2015	Dysart v. Palms of Pasadena Hospital (FL)	RN filed a claim of race discrimination. She alleged that she was told she could not provide care to the patient after the family requested the patient not be treated by any African Americans. The district court ordered partial summary judgement on behalf of the plaintiff.
2014	Hardiman-Davis v. Southridge Healthcare (SD)	RN filed a claim of race discrimination. She alleged that she was regularly subjected to racially-charged harassment from residents and was fired when she told a resident that he needed to speak to her respectfully.
2013	Battle v. Hurley Medical Center (MI)	RN filed a claim of race discrimination. She alleged that she was not allowed to treat an infant because she was Black. The medical center paid the nurse \$200,000 to settle the case.

# Lawsuits

- Results have been mixed
- Plaintiffs have been unable to perform job responsibilities because of race
- Plaintiffs have described feeling harassed, humiliated, marginalized, devalued and discriminated against
- In most cases, health care organizations have indicated that they do not accommodate requests by patients to receive care from a team member based solely on characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, pregnancy status, marital status, height, weight or color

# Lawsuits

- State regulations that residents have a right to “choose personal attending physician and other providers of services” conflict with Title VII’s prohibition of treating employees differently based on race

# Lawsuits: Mixed Findings

- When ruling in favor of the defendant, the courts have indicated the effect on the Plaintiff was de minimis (minor) and temporary. Because the Black nurse suffered no adverse employment action, such as a change in shift, hours, or pay, no law was broken.
- The cases distinguish racial discrimination from gender discrimination. Multiple cases hold that gender discrimination may be considered a bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) to protect patient privacy. No BFOQ exists for racial discrimination.

# Why Does This Occur?

- In the United States, White superiority has been used to justify slavery, the slaughter of American Indians, and the exclusion of non-White and non-Christian immigrants
- Government and social institutions have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power, and resources to White people

# Institutional Racism

- Is not about whether an individual health-care provider behaves in a racist manner
- It's about how the system is structured and how the stereotypes health-care providers bring to the job become institutionalized in the system
- Definition
  - The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin
  - Can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviors that amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and stereotyping that disadvantages people in ethnic minority groups

# Institutional Racism

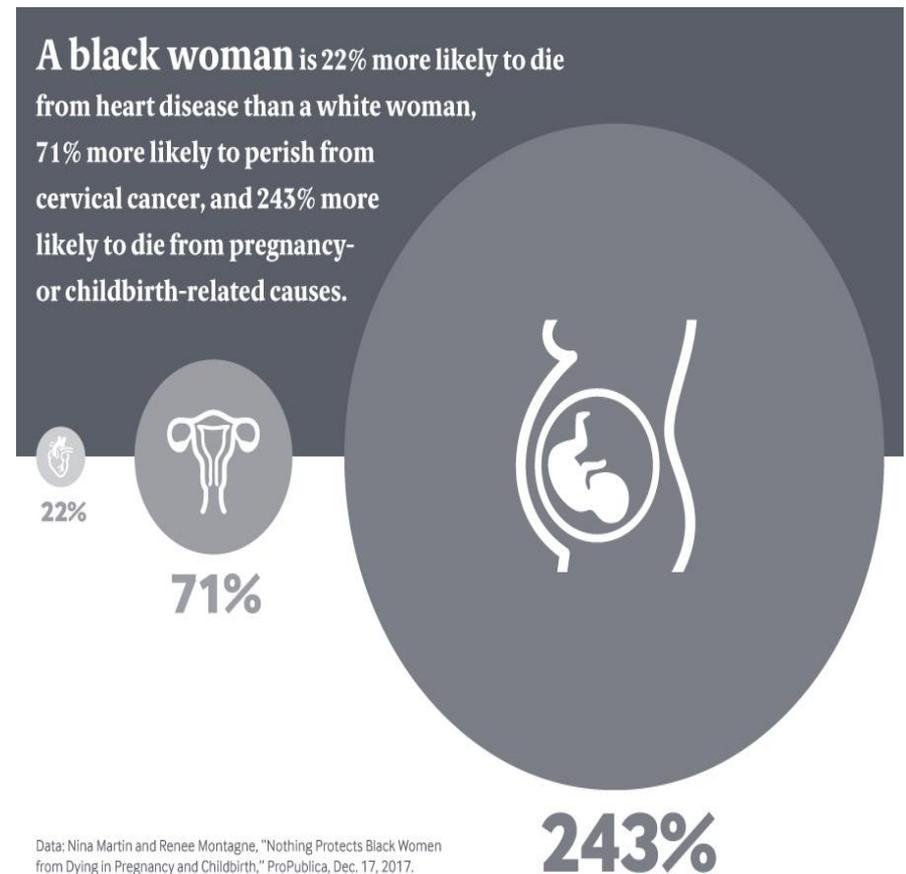
- One manifestation in nursing and healthcare: a patient's refusal to receive care provided by a nurse or nursing assistant of color
- Look around – there are many more



# Some Manifestations of Institutional Racism

## Race and ethnicity-related disparities

- Failure to receive appropriate care for pneumonia, myocardial infarctions, pain and preventive measures for post-operative complication
- Higher rates of chronic illness
- Higher rates of premature death
- High maternal death rates



# Some Manifestation of Microaggressions\*

- “Are you a nurse?”
- “Don’t you work in housekeeping?”
- “Are you delivering my tray?”
- “Please tell my nurse...”

\*From focus groups I conducted in 2017

# How Do We Confront and Extinguish?



# Attorney Perspectives

- Health care organizations should have a policy consistent with the law and abide by it
  - They are obligated to comply with nondiscrimination laws
  - They are obligated to protect employees from harassment
  - Clinicians must provide care to patient who hold different beliefs than them
  - Require competent patients to act appropriately
  - Tricky if patient is not mentally stable

# Moving Forward in Nursing



# ANA's Position

- “...concerted efforts must continue for discrimination to be eliminated in all its forms”
- “All nurses must recognize the potential impact of unconscious bias and practices contributing to discrimination, and actively seek opportunities to promote inclusion of all people in the provision of quality health care while eradicating disparities.””

# What is Our Role as Nurses?

(ANA Position Statement)

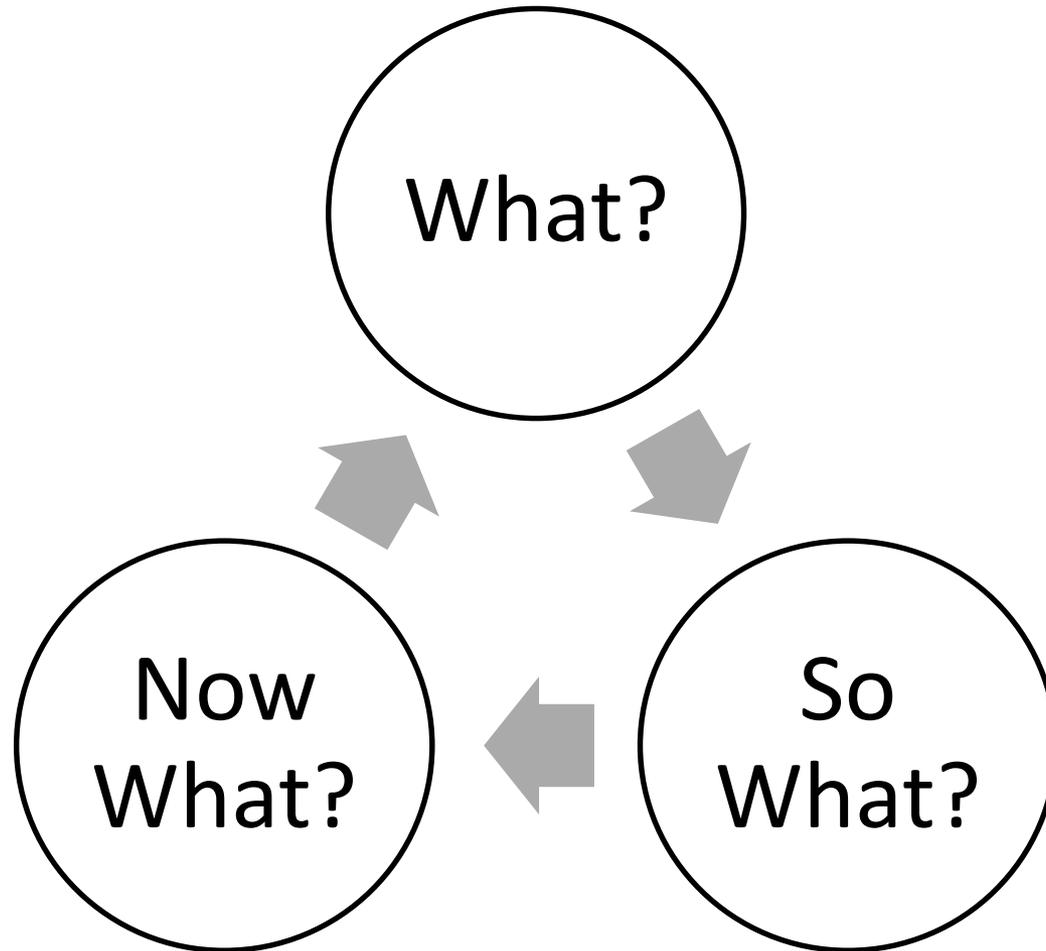
- “Intentional or blatant discriminatory practices must not be tolerated...”
- “...encourage all health care agencies to adopt and aggressively maintain policies, procedures, and practices that embrace inclusiveness, promote civility and mutual respect, contain methods for reporting violations, and require interventions to avoid recurrence.”
- “...embrace the conceptions of justice and caring, diversity and inclusiveness, and civility and mutual respect as guiding principles within the provision of health care.”

# What is Our Role as Practitioners?

- Identify institutional policies and practices that advantage some groups at the expense of others
- Bring these policies and practice to the attention of nurse executives
- Bring incidences of microaggression, racism, discrimination and prejudice to the attention of nurse executives
- Reflect on personal and professional values regarding civility, mutual respect, and inclusiveness



# Borton Reflection Model



# What is Our Role as Nurse Executives?

- Advocate for policies that are inclusive and promote civility and human rights for all health care workers, patients, and others within the organization and community.
- Ensure that existing policies are implemented in practice
  - They have no impact if they aren't used

# Example: Spectrum Health Lawsuit

- Michelle Acklen versus Spectrum Health System
  - October 2017
  - Sued Spectrum Health for granting a White patient's request for no Black caregivers
  - Supervisor told Acklen that a patient no longer wanted Black caregivers
  - Request was granted
  - Acklen had to switch her patient assignment with a White nurse

# Example: Spectrum Health Statement

“Spectrum Health **deeply values the diversity** of our employees, medical staff, patients, volunteers and visitors. This includes cultivating a **diverse workforce** and **creating an environment of mutual respect** for all. Our policy is very specific and clear that we **do not accommodate requests by patients to receive care from a team member based solely on characteristics** such as race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, pregnancy status, marital status, height, weight or color. We **do not tolerate discrimination or engage in discriminatory behaviors.**”

# Example: Spectrum Health Lawsuit

- Attorney wrote:
  - “(Acklen) felt harassed, humiliated and discriminated against as a result of the segregation of her job duties and being unable to perform her job responsibilities because of her race.”
  - “Defendant intentionally discriminated against African American employees, including the plaintiff, when it required that no Black employees care for a certain Caucasian patient.”

# Example: Spectrum Health Article

- Accessed article online
  - 154 comments
  - Some supportive of nurse
  - Others viewed this as a “money grabb”
  - All missed key aspects of the case
    - Marginalization, humiliation and devaluing experienced by the nurse
    - Institutional racism that allowed it to occur

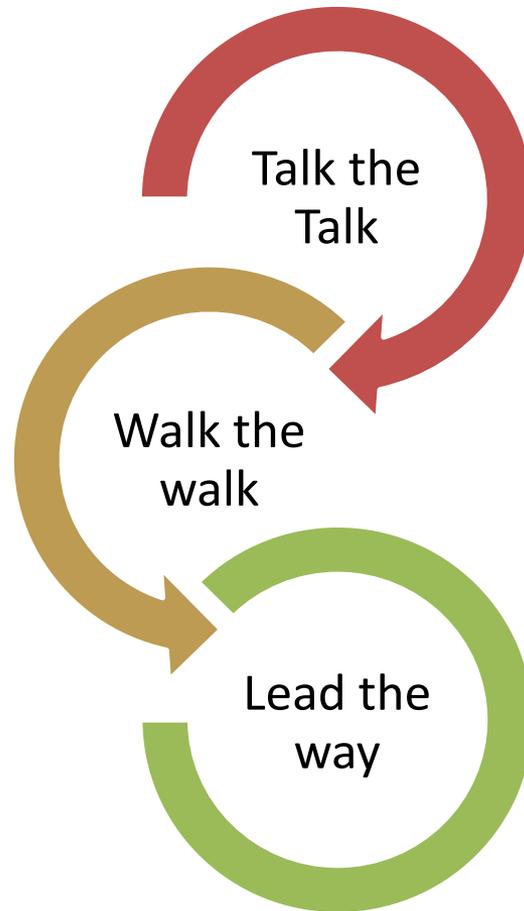
# Role as Nurse Executives

- Work to identify and eliminate discrimination and microaggressions from the healthcare setting
  - Set clear expectations for staff members, patients and visitors
  - Take action when these expectations are violated
  - Support nurses of color when they experience microaggressions

# Other Responsibilities for Nurse Executives

- Conduct a comprehensive and critical examination of policies and procedures
- Empower the development of diverse formal and informal leadership at all levels
- Develop a plan that increases accountability, demonstrates transparency and reorganizes power

# Summary for Administrators



# What is Our Role as Educators?

- Diversify of the health-care workforce through more “pipeline” programs
- Teach students that racism is real and combines prejudice with power
- Explain to students that they can't pretend that race doesn't exist
- Clarify that we all have a responsibility to help dismantle systemic racism





We have an Obligation to Our Students...



...And to Our Future Nurses

# Audience Feedback: What is Our Role as Researchers?

- Pull out your smart phone
- Join at [www.kahoot.it](http://www.kahoot.it) or with the Kahoot! app
- Enter Game PIN: 135706

<https://play.kahoot.it/v2/lobby?quizId=b730e3e7-d2b2-40db-bace-391993dd52f6>

# What is Our Role as Researchers?

What type of research is needed in the area of microaggression against nurses of color?

- A. Determine frequency of occurrences
- B. Identify strategies to prevent occurrences
- C. Understand how racism affects nurses of color
- D. All of the above

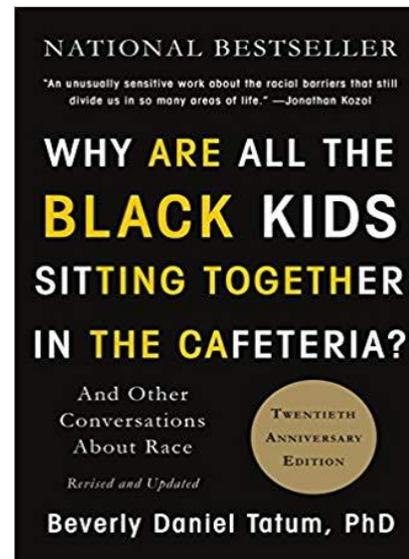
# Reminders for All of Us

- Implicit bias
  - Our own unconscious prejudices can affect the way we treat patients and colleagues
  - **Policy Implications:**
    - California recently mandated implicit bias training for physicians, nurses, judges, and police officers
    - Others?
- Fight racism and discrimination
  - Acknowledge that it's not easy to talk about racism – and we need to have this conversation

# Why Isn't it Easy to Talk About Race?

Beverly Daniel Tatum, PhD

Educator and Former President of Spelman  
College, Atlanta Georgia



# Talking about Race

- Think about your earliest memory about race
- How old were you?
- What emotion was attached to the experience?
- Did you discuss this with an adult?
- Why not?

# Reminders

- Recognize, name, and understand attitudes and actions
- Be open to identifying and controlling our own implicit biases
- Manage overt bigotry safely, learn from it, and educate others
- Make a conscious choice to challenge the system of domination and exploitation of people of color
- Actively oppose both overt and subtle forms of racism



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Last Thought:

*“Hatred confuses life: love harmonizes it.  
Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it.”*

Martin Luther King Jr.

Thank you for  
allowing me to share!



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