

# Term paper on health disparities and ethical issue

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## **Health disparities related to race, culture, and ethnicity**

### Ethics and Health Disparities

There is no doubt that health disparities are an ethical conundrum to the US health systems despite efforts made to ensure equitable healthcare access to all citizens. Wide range of literature supporting the prevalence of healthcare disparities coupled with the realms of unequal utilization of healthcare services. The Institute of Medicine report (IOM) defines disparities in healthcare as ethnic or racial differences in the healthcare quality not related to clinical needs or access-related factors, appropriateness of intervention, or preferences. On the other hand, the National Institute of Health (NIH) defines disparities as the differences in incidence, mortality, prevalence, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions to specific population groups. Regardless of the definition, healthcare disparities are horrendous, tragic, and ethically unacceptable such that health institutions and professionals must work together to end the vice.

## **Health disparities related to race, culture, and ethnicity**

The existence of health disparities along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines has been a major issue in the history of the US healthcare system. Sadly, this happens despite the sturdy growth of the overall health levels in the US health system. Even though the passage of the Medicaid and Medicare provide hopes of delivering adequate primary healthcare, inequalities in accessing healthcare has been ubiquitous among the minority groups. Statistics by Shaw-Ridley (2012) show that ethnic minority groups fare much worse when it comes to accessing issues related to accessing

healthcare. Cases of health disparities are widespread and range from difficulties in accessing quality healthcare to clinical biases from the nursing practitioners and clinicians. In 2008, Healthy People 2020 estimates showed that nearly 100 million (33%) of the US population comprises of ethnic populations, and these suffer from health disparities. The affected individuals include Asian-Americans, Hispanics, Black-Americans, and Hindus. These groups face obstacles while accessing healthcare based lines religion, racial or ethnic groups, and socio-economic statuses among others (Shaw-Ridley, 2012).

National indicators show that ethnic and racial minorities are found on the bottom of the list on matters relating to health and wellbeing. Even at levels where all individuals have equivalent access to healthcare; racial and ethnic minorities experience a lower quality of health services making it difficult for them to receive routine medical procedures as compared to non-minority groups. The sources of disparities in healthcare along ethnic and racial lines are complex, most of which are deep-rooted in the historic and contemporary inequities. Such practices involve participants at several levels be it in the health system, at the administrative and professional levels, or through the bureaucratic processes. According to Hosseini (2010), disparities reflect the socio-economic differences and inadequate access to quality healthcare.

### **Nurses' ethical responsibilities**

Nurses' ought to be committed to efforts aimed at the elimination of ethnic and racial health disparities. This begins with abiding by the code of ethics principles that guide the nursing profession such as the American Nurses

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Association Code of Ethics. Practices expected of them include upholding professional relationships and practices to all individuals irrespective of their race or ethnic background, providing equal quality of healthcare and health to all patients, and collaborating with other health professionals in fulfilling the health needs of the community. Equally, Nurses should perceive their responsibilities to ensure that they reflect equal service to the diverse population of the United States. Other important professional and ethical codes that should guide nurses include American Medical Association practices geared towards the elimination of disparities in healthcare.

Other than abiding by professional principles, nurses ought to possess cross-cultural skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will enable them to practice diversity at all levels. Nurses are responsible for serving the community and getting involved strongly with health issues aimed at eliminating disparities within the community.

### **Strategic Plan to Address the Health Disparity Issue**

As earlier mentioned, the sources of health disparities are diverse, poorly understood, and complex, and therefore, much more needs to be done in order to win the fight. Nurses have a critical role to play in the fight against health disparities, and for this reason, they ought to try the following ways in their efforts to combat the fight against gender disparity (Hosseini, 2010).

First, Nurse must promote the concept of equity of care and consistency in applying professional code of ethics and guidelines when executing their responsibilities. This will enable them to improve the level of communication and ensure constant supply of healthcare services to all patients regardless

of their ethnic backgrounds. Equally related is the aspect of avoiding the delivery of healthcare services along socioeconomic lines because this forms the root of all discrimination.

The second option entails the implementation of a proper training system for nurses such that all nurses become aware of the rights and liberties of all citizens. This will also enable the nurses to understand ways of participating in clinical decision-making. Nursing can extend the concept of education to patients by educating them on their rights and channels they can follow to seek redress in case of discrimination along racial or ethnic lines or ways of assessing violation of their civil rights. Cross-cultural curriculum should also be integrated into the training program for nurses whereby the need for diversity should be critically evaluated.

Finally yet important, nurses should consider approaching the issue using a multi-component intervention strategy that is aimed at the reduction of healthcare disparities along ethnic and racial lines. Such interventions target a diverse range of patients, healthcare practitioners, and the healthcare institution. In such a setting, nurses can collaborate with other professionals and healthcare institutions towards the development of strategies that will guide the process of minimizing disparities along ethnic and racial lines.

## **Conclusions**

While the causes of disparities in healthcare are wide, poorly understood, and complex, health practitioners (physicians, nurses, and physician assistants) must play a leading role in the fight against health disparities. On a higher level, the optimization of healthcare and health for all individuals

should form the principle of the US healthcare industry. Concerning the ethical issue of healthcare disparities, not only are health disparities a moral wrong but they also serve to perpetuate historical lines of injustice. By virtue of its nature, healthcare ethics involve views, values, and propositions that invite can provoke controversy. For the reasons identified in this paper, it becomes emphatically crucial that nurses ought to play a leading role in ensuring that the issue of disparities along racial and ethnic lines is contained. Strategies to be adopted include understanding diversity of cultures, improving education, and approaching the issue from a multi-interventionist point of view. By nature of its discussion, there is no doubt that disparities along ethnic or racial lines not only impede access to healthcare but they also undermine the quality of available healthcare.

## References

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