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Advancing Health Equity: The Rise of Equity-Minded Nurses



In the wake of a national inflection point after the highly publicized killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020, nurses have become even more activated to leverage the potential of the nursing profession to advance health equity. In May 2021, the National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine released the *Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Health Equity*. In it they stated, “A nation cannot fully thrive until everyone — no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they make — can live the healthiest possible life. And helping people live their healthiest life is and has always been the essential role of nurses.... Nurses, then, have a critical role to play in achieving the goal of health equity” (p 3-4).

Health equity is an aspirational vision of what population health can be. To achieve health equity, we must address and solve health inequities which can be defined as the systemic, avoidable, and unjust social and economic policies and practices that create barriers to health (Braveman & Gruskin, 2003). Health equity can only be achieved by a collective approach which embraces the wisdom of all healthcare disciplines, including nursing. At four million strong, the nursing profession has the potential to influence policy on

the systems, structures, and communities in which they work. However, as Nikitas, Emmons, and Ackerman-Barger noted, “For far too long, nursing and nurses have observed the negative impact of health inequities and disparate outcomes without seeing themselves as drivers of change” (2022, p. 7). By adopting the concept of “equity-minded nurses” we can rewrite this script for ourselves and become central to constructing the health outcomes that align with our professional and personal values.

Equity-minded nurses are those with the knowledge, skills, and desire to advance health equity. Equity-minded nurses recognize themselves as informed and capable drivers of change who are uniquely poised to inform healthcare practice, policies, research, and educational standards. The term ‘equity-minded’ was coined by the [Center for Urban Education](#) and “refers to the mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who are willing to assess their own racialized assumptions, to acknowledge their lack of knowledge in the history of race and racism, to take responsibility for the success of historically underserved and minoritized student groups, and to critically assess racialization in the their own practices as educators and/or administrators” (McNair, Bensimon, Malcolm-Piqueux, 2020, p. 20).

Translated into nursing practice we might say that equity-minded nurses are

... those who are willing to assess their own racialized assumptions and recognize how these assumptions can impact their clinical decision making, to acknowledge the history of race and racism and how this history impacts current health outcomes, to take responsibility for the optimizing the health and wellness of historically underserved and minoritized individual patients, communities, and populations, and to critically assess racialization in their own practices as nurses, policy-makers, educators, researchers and/or leaders.

Equity-minded nurses so deeply understand and embrace health equity, social justice, anti-racism, and cultural humility that these concepts emerge as normalized, automatic and default thought processes no matter the setting or the group of people they work with.

This is an exciting time in our development as a profession. The Future of Nursing: *Campaign for Action*, an initiative of AARP Foundation, AARP and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has given us a [call to action](#): “Achieving

health equity will require serious reflection on our identities and responsibilities as nurses, nurse champions and contributing members of society. Then we will need the willpower to turn that reflection into action.”

Through blogs, webinars, and events, the *Campaign* will spend the next 12-months highlighting examples of how equity-minded nurses practice, innovate, collaborate, and most importantly, positively impact the health of individuals, families, and communities. We hope you will join us on this journey and exploration.

References

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Our vision: Everyone in America can live a healthier life, advanced by equity-minded nurses as essential and valued partners in providing care and promoting health equity and well-being.

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