

RACISM IN HEALTHCARE

Notice, Understand and Act

Bias and Microaggressions



“Whether you like it or not, if you have a brain, you have bias”

~ Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt

In healthcare, we must acknowledge the role bias plays in our decisions and interactions. Bias leads to inaccurate judgements about people that can have significant consequences. We all have bias. Unconscious bias, for example, occurs when we unknowingly judge people based on stereotypes or false information that we assume to be true. For example, if a physician assumes (even unintentionally) a Black patient is less intelligent or more likely to engage in risky behavior, they may not recommend needed treatments for fear the patient won't comply. Or if they assume that Black patients have a higher pain tolerance, needed medications may not be prescribed. These are just two of many examples of how bias can negatively impact healthcare.



Bias also appears in the form of **microaggressions**. These are the slights, snubs, or insults that people in marginalized groups face daily. Microaggressions can be verbal or non-verbal, intentional, or unintentional, and communicate hurtful messages. For example, telling a Black person “*You’re so articulate*” can imply that people of color are not well-spoken. Black physicians are often mistaken for cleaning staff, as people assume they are in roles requiring less education. Although they can come with positive intentions, microaggressions can reveal harmful assumptions, occur frequently and negatively impact emotional wellbeing.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO US?

Even a small amount of bias can have a significant impact, and when bias influences medical decisions, the consequences are life and death. Research shows that bias negatively influences the overall health and health outcomes for people of color. It also contributes to well documented health disparities among groups. To provide exceptional care and service to all, we must work to increase awareness about bias and combat its negative effects in healthcare. While we may not be able to completely eliminate bias, we can increase our awareness, work to actively disrupt our biases and be more intentional in combatting the effects of bias in healthcare.

GROW YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

Review any or all of the resources below to learn more about bias and microaggressions. Spend time reflecting on how you can act on what you've learned.

Read about the effects of unconscious bias in healthcare.	Unconscious Bias in Healthcare (5 min read)
Read about how medical schools are revamping their curriculum to help doctors recognize and combat bias.	Can Healthcare Be Cured of Racial Bias (8 min read)
Watch this 1-minute video that defines and gives examples of microaggressions.	What Are Microaggressions (1 min watch)
Watch this powerful and entertaining TED talk about we can combat our biases by moving towards vs. away from them.	How to Overcome Biases? Walk Boldly Toward Them (18 min watch)

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Think about what you can do to challenge bias. Below are some suggested next steps:

- Seek out training or additional resources to learn more about common biases, their causes, and how to counteract them.
- Take time to challenge your assumptions and practice empathy.
- When you do or say something that hurts or offends others, take time to listen, acknowledge your mistake, apologize, and commit to doing better.
- Share what you've learned – have discussions with co-workers about the impact of bias.
- Avoid defensiveness. Remember that *everyone* has biases, so you can work to identify and reduce the effects of bias instead of trying to prove that you don't have any.