



MICROAGGRESSIONS: AWARENESS AND MITIGATION IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS

Microaggressions are subtle, and often unintentional expressions (verbal or nonverbal) of bias and prejudice. These actions, which are often directed towards those who are underrepresented in the environment, can have a significant impact on an individual's well-being and sense of belonging.

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Recognizing and addressing microaggressions in all situational contexts is important. This is especially critical in health care settings, where microaggressions can adversely affect patient welfare, quality of care, health equity, and provider well-being.

- Patient Welfare: Microaggressions erode patient trust and confidence, leading to decreased adherence to medical advice and avoidance of seeking care. Ultimately, this leads to poorer health outcomes. Additionally, microaggressions can contribute to increased stress and anxiety for patients, hindering effective communication, and impeding the therapeutic relationship between health care providers and patients.
- Quality of Care: Microaggressions can lead to diminished rapport between health care providers and patients, hindering essential communication and shared decision-making. Furthermore, microaggressions can create an environment in which biases influence clinical judgment.
- Health Equity: Microaggressions perpetuate systemic biases and stereotypes, which often lead to differential treatment and access to resources among marginalized groups. In addition, microaggressions can lead to mistrust in health care institutions and thereby expand the gap in health outcomes between identity groups.
- Provider Well-Being: Both patients and providers can experience microaggressions. These can undermine provider morale and job satisfaction. Moreover, being a victim of microaggressions can lead to feelings of distress, isolation, and psychological strain among providers.

Microaggressions are categorized into three groups:

Type	Examples
<p>Microassault</p> <p>A deliberate verbal abuse or behavior that is intended to demean, offend, or discriminate.</p>	<p><i>"Why do I get a dumb black nurse?"</i></p> <p><i>"Your kind isn't made for this field. Perhaps you should consider a different career."</i></p> <p><i>"This is America. Speak English like everyone else."</i></p>



Type	Examples
<p>Microinsult</p> <p>A subtle and often unintentional comment or act that conveys rudeness, insensitivity, or disrespect.</p>	<p><i>“You are so articulate for someone from your background.”</i></p> <p><i>“Wow, you’re really strong for a woman”</i></p> <p><i>“Are you sure you can handle this task? It might be too complicated for someone like you.”</i></p>
<p>Microinvalidation</p> <p>A comment or behavior that negates or dismisses an individuals’ feelings or lived experiences.</p>	<p><i>“You are just being overly sensitive; there is no need to make everything about race.”</i></p> <p><i>“I do not see color. We are all the same.”</i></p> <p><i>“Your concerns about discrimination are over the top. This institution treats everyone fairly.”</i></p>

Microaggressions can have a profound impact on the well-being and experiences of individuals in health care settings. Below are some strategies individuals can use to enhance awareness and combat microaggressions in health care settings:

1

Seek education and training

Seek education on topics such as cultural competence, diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and unconscious biases. Education can be in the form of trainings / workshops, but also through engaging in conversations with individuals with diverse perspectives.

2

Enhance awareness

Enhance your awareness of existence and impact of microaggressions in health care settings, and encourage others to do the same. Encourage open dialogue and discussion among your peers to create a supportive environment where issues can be addressed openly and constructively.



3

Become an ally

Speak up when you witness a microaggression. Provide assertive and constructive feedback to educate the instigator as to why their action was inappropriate.

4

Seek and provide feedback

Ask for and provide feedback to continuously enhance your awareness of microaggressions. Focusing on reflection and self-awareness is key in fostering welcoming and inclusive environments.

Sources:

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