The Cultural Competence of Mental Health

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Background

Approximately one in five adults in the U.S. (46.6 million) experiences mental illness each year. With these statistics, it is incumbent upon nursing education to proficiently prepare nurses in the culture of mental health. In addition to challenges related to access to care, socio-economics, and other health disparities, clients with mental health illness can also present with a stigma attached, that may impact health outcomes from clinicians not proficient in this culture. Culture may be expressed as a way of life, customs and traditions, habits, mores, and values. A patient's culture can have a great impact on his or her ability to engage in positive interactions in the healthcare setting. Sensitivity to the issues influencing the patient's symptoms and treatment and awareness of individual differences when developing a culturally appropriate care plan is imperative. This presentation will explore the importance of incorporating mental health competency into an APRN curriculum and strategies to decrease personal bias and improve patient care experiences for this vulnerable population

Objectives

1. Define cultural competency
2. Identify personal bias and impact on caring for patients with mental health needs.
3. Explore strategies to integrate mental health cultural competency within APRN practice settings

Factors Influencing Care of Patients with Mental Disorders

Family & Environmental Factors

The concept of family can go beyond traditional nuclear patterns and may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, other relatives, friends, or other nontraditional members. Family Dynamics include:
* Culture
* Religion
* Self-identified race, tribe, or nationality
* Societal Standards

Both physical and psychosocial environmental factors should be considered. These can include:
*Social contacts
* Housing/ Geographic location
* Air pollution
* Clean water
* Neighborhood crime
* Transportation
* Homelessness

Employment

Mental illness can debilitate a patient's ability to maintain employment.
Loss of employment can occur because of:
* Frequent provider visits
* Medication changes
* Fluctuating moods

Migrant/ seasonal workers face increased risk for poor mental health due to:
* Dangerous work locations
* Lack of acculturation
* Isolation
* Discrimination
* Lack of access to health care
* Lack of health care benefits

Sexual Orientation

Viewing each patient as a unique individual, including sexual orientation helps us provide a holistic approach to care. Terms to understand include:
* Sexual identity or orientation
* Gender identity
* Sexual behavior or activity

Spirituality

Religion is an organized, community-based system of beliefs, whereas spirituality resides within the individual's beliefs. Spirituality may give some patients structure while coping with symptoms of their mental illness and aid in reflective practices, which allow for inner growth. Religiosity has been shown to:
* Reduce suicide rates
* Decrease alcoholism and drug use
* Create a sense of belonging
* Encourage compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude
* Allows connection to something bigger than self

Strategies to Integrate Mental Health Competencies into APRN Practice

APRN curriculum should incorporate strategies to reduce health disparities for those with mental health diagnosis within school curriculum. Strategies should include:
* Threading competencies throughout core course content
* The addition of cultural mental health components in OSCEs
* Embedding cultural mental health competencies in assignments, including a self-reflection of the scenario to evaluate personal or unconscienced bias

APRN can make a positive impact on patients' quality of life by advocating for, educating, and empowering them in their overall care. In the culture of mental health, APRN must consider approaching patients with the tools needed to address many facets of quality health care. These should include consideration of available community support services and collaboration with interprofessional team members to obtain necessary services.

When assessing individuals with mental health diagnosis use nonconfrontational, nonjudgmental language remembering personal space and body language. Assess for:
* Safe environment
* Ability to obtain medications and safely store
* Access to shelter and clean water
* Transportation for appointments

By being informed about how to deliver culturally competent mental health care, APRN can be champions for this patient population.

Take Away Points

Reflect on any unconscienced bias and approach the patient with empathetic and supportive demeanor
Build rapport to support a trusting patient relationship
Include family, environment, employment, sexual orientation, and spirituality in developing a plan of care
Connect support services within the community and the patient

References

Jimenez, R. & Thal, W. (2020). Culturally competent mental health care. *Nursing Made Incredibly Easy!* May/June, pp. 46-49.

Additional References Available on Request