ISPN Position Statement on Diversity, Cultural Competence, and Access to Mental Health Care

Significance & Relevance

Throughout our shrinking global community, we are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of human diversity in our daily lives. Diversity encompasses a variety of cultures, ethnicities, religions, behaviors, orientations, and values within the contexts of environmental and economic influences. Diversity has had an impact on every fiber of our society, including physical health and mental health care needs. Ongoing evidence from numerous research studies has documented the bleak healthcare picture that exists for millions of individuals within this global community, especially those who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

The Global Burden of Disease (2000) has clearly shown that psychiatric conditions such as depression, substance abuse, suicide, and violence in its many forms are adversely affecting the physical and mental health, quality of life, and overall functioning of a significant number of citizens worldwide. Within the United States, there has been a significant increase in individuals from diverse populations due to the vast numbers of immigrants entering the country and the increased numbers of live births. According to the Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health (2001), "racial and ethnic minorities bear a greater burden from unmet mental health needs and thus suffer a greater loss to their overall health and productivity" (p. 3). Globally and nationally we now have critical numbers of individuals across the life span who are unable to access a range of healthcare services or who are experiencing barriers when they do access care. Consequently, both the World Health Organization (2001) and Healthy People 2010 (2001) have targeted the elimination of disparities in health care.

The International Society of Psychiatric Nurses (ISPN) identifies the urgent need to strengthen our cultural competence toward addressing the mental health care needs of diverse individuals, families, and groups to improve their access to, and attainment of, quality mental health care in a variety of settings and environments.

Relevant Literature

❑ Mental illness is considered the product of a complex interaction among biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors.

❑ Cultural meanings of illness have real consequences in terms of whether people are motivated to seek treatment, how they cope with their symptoms, how supportive their families and communities are, where they seek help, the pathways they take to get services, and how well they fare in treatment.

❑ Although communication is the core of mental health treatment, understanding of the process of communication with diverse populations is just beginning to be explored.

❑ Barriers to mental health care such as inability to communicate effectively with providers, lack of a culturally competent service delivery stream, lack of continuity in providers, and lack of quality care have been well documented.

❑ Populations that experience racism/discrimination, violence, and economic hardship are most vulnerable to disparities in mental health care.

❑ Diverse populations have been poorly represented in research on treatment modalities and treatment outcomes.

❑ Mental health professionals do not reflect the diversity within the U.S. population and many other developed nations.

❑ Many members from diverse populations feel they would receive better health care if they were members of the majority indigenous population.

Goal and Objectives

ISPN and its members are committed to embarking on the "cultural competence journey" by:

• Advocating for access to and attainment of high quality mental health services for diverse individuals, families, and groups.

• Providing direct mental health care services in a culturally competent manner to diverse individuals, families, and groups.

- Advocating for and engaging in mental health care research aimed at eliminating disparities and intervening in a culturally and linguistically competent manner with individuals, families, and groups.

- Participating in policy initiatives that promote availability of access to quality mental health care services to diverse individuals, families, and groups.

- Supporting initiatives to increase the number of mental health practitioners from diverse backgrounds.

- Advocating for primary prevention programs that are sensitive to the needs of diverse individuals, families, and groups.

- Advocating for research related to the efficacy of providing mental health services integrated with primary care.

Immediate Action Plan

In order to achieve the goals of supporting diversity and cultural competency in mental health care, ISPN will:

1. Offer at least one presentation annually at its national conference that focuses on diversity and or cultural competence and its impact on access to mental health care for an individual, family, or group.
2. Acknowledge annually at the national conference an individual, program, or organization that demonstrates culturally competent clinical practice, research, policy initiatives, or advocacy in support of mental health services for the vulnerable or underserved populations.
3. Involve members in at least one "careers-in-health day" activity at a high school or health fair serving a predominantly minority population to disseminate information about mental health nursing. A summary of this activity will be incorporated into the organization's annual report.
4. Develop a list of ISPN members willing to serve as mentors for minority students in their geographic area who are contemplating a career in the mental health profession.

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