

Student Essay

Respect For Cultural Diversity

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“Diversity is the one thing we have in common, celebrate it everyday”

It is uncontroversial to call for respect for cultural diversity and recognition of pluralism in a globalized world today. At present, the world we live in comprises about 195 countries, 6500 languages and more than 5000 ethnic and cultural groups - making our world more wonderful and colourful, or is it otherwise? Is this diversity making our world a chaotic place? But before going into these controversies, what actually is culture?

Culture, is a “way of being”. It is often described as the combination of a body of knowledge, a body of belief. It is that which shapes our identity and influences our behaviour. Culture is the lens with which we evaluate everything around us - we evaluate what is proper or improper, normal or abnormal through our culture. When these cultural differences can be felt and appreciated and used to make our lives better, we often use them as standards to judge other cultures and these judgements could reach a level where people begin to discriminate against those whose ways of being are different from their own – essentially, we tend to fear which we do not understand.

Importance of respect for cultural diversity in healthcare system:

Cultural respect is critical to reducing health disparities and improving access to high quality of care and response to the needs of diverse patients. When developed and implemented as a framework, cultural respect enables systems, agencies and groups of professionals to function effectively to understand the needs of group accessing health information and healthcare

Cultural respect is also critical for achieving accuracy in medical research. Poor planning in medical research, planning that does not take into account principles for cultural respect may yield inaccurate results.

Respect for cultural diversity provides many benefits for healthcare professionals and healthcare organizations along with the patients. Social benefits include increased mutual respect between healthcare workers and patients, increased trust and promotion of patient responsibility and empowerment in their own healthcare. When patients feel heard and understood by their healthcare provider, they are more likely to participate in preventive healthcare and less likely to miss health appointments. This can reduce medical errors and related legal costs for healthcare facilities and it can improve health outcomes for patients. Ultimately, a culturally competent organization can help reduce health disparities among patient-population, which is still a common problem today.

Lastly, cultural diversity supports the idea that every person can make a unique and positive contribution to the larger society because of, rather than their cultural differences. Imagine a place where diversity is recognized and respected; various cultural ideas are acknowledged and valued; contributions from all groups are encouraged; people are empowered to achieve their full potential; and differences are celebrated. So, the ‘take-home’ message is to look for ways to take advantage of linguistic and cultural diversity, rather than to treat this diversity as a problem.

As goes the saying from **Nelson Mandela** –

*“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin,
or his background, or his religion.
people must learn to hate, and if
they can learn to hate,
they can be taught to love,
for love comes more naturally
to the human heart than its opposite.”*

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