Implicit Bias in Healthcare
A poster by the PCS Collaborative Governance Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Implicit biases are attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious or involuntary manner. How do you feel as you look through the rows of pictures below?

One form of implicit bias is judging people based on assumptions about their appearances. A person’s skin color, what they are dressed in and how they wear it, how their hair is done and a host of other factors can be the basis on which people make assumptions and draw conclusions about others, be they patients, visitors or staff members. If someone is dressed in scrubs, they might be received in a more positive way; if they are in a hoodie and baggy clothes, they may be perceived in a negative way.

Gone unchecked, implicit biases can undermine the culture of the hospital, a department or a unit. They come in different categories.

**Affinity Bias**
- Tending to be more receptive to people who resemble our lives in some way.
- “I hired that nurse because she reminds me of my sister”

**Confirmation Bias**
- Looking for information about a person that supports our beliefs and ignoring details to the contrary.
- “She’s from the “Deep South” so she’s not that well educated, she really wouldn’t be a good ‘fit’ for the nursing position we are hiring for.”

**Perception Bias**
- Stereotyping people based on a group (ethnic/racial) to which a person belongs.
- “The patient in room 10 is from a racial group that commits many crimes, he just has that look about him, he is probably a criminal too, so be careful.”

**Bandwagon Bias**
- Simply believing something because others believe it.
- “No one else really likes that clinic, it is in a poor neighborhood, so I wouldn’t go there either.”
WHAT CAN I DO TO FIGHT THE EFFECTS OF IMPLICIT BIAS?

1. Increase Your Awareness
   This is the first step. Take the test, see what your own implicit biases are at http://implicit.harvard.edu.

2. Understand Your Biases
   www.lookdifferent.org/what-can-i-do/implicitassociation-test

3. Make the Conscious Effort
   Learn to understand people of different cultures, races, backgrounds, appearances...and how your preconceived notions affect your attitude toward those groups and individuals.

4. Be Mindful
   This is a mental practice and a trait that involves paying attention to present-moment experience with an attitude of receptivity and acceptance.

5. Practice Cultural Humility
   • Start with the personal choice to enter an ongoing process of self-reflection and self-critique.
   • Look at one’s own background and how their social environment is shaped.
   • Focus then on learning about and understanding the make-up and context of another’s culture.

6. Increase Exposure to Counter-stereotypical Images.
   Studies show that repeated exposure to counter-stereotypical images can help reduce bias, e.g., a picture of a black woman who is a research scientist; the assumption is that people of color aren’t good at math or science. (MTV’s Look Different: bias cleanse)

references

1. http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/