One Key to A Culture of Health: Knowing your own implicit biases

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What do we mean by implicit bias?
“The human brain has been called an ‘anticipation machine.’ It learns from the past to anticipate the future. Past experiences become perceptual filters that shape how you actually see or hear or understand what’s going on in the present moment.”

Daniel Siegel, Co-Director
UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
BIAS is hard wired into our brain’s functioning

- At any one time, our senses are bombarded with as many as 11 million pieces of information while our brains can only functionally work with 40-50 items.
- We deal with this challenge by building unconscious perceptual filters that allow some information in and block some out based on our personal and cultural experience.
Not everyone ‘sees’ the same thing

Let’s see what YOU see!

Focus Test
IMPLICIT BIAS

- attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner
IMPLICIT BIAS

- activated quickly and unknowingly by situational cues (e.g., a person's skin color or accent or other characteristics), silently exerting its influence on perception, memory, and behavior
IMPLICIT BIAS IN HEALTHCARE:
So what difference does it make?

- Pain levels estimated as lower for black patients, thus less pain medication prescribed for same conditions as whites.
- Healthcare workers more likely to believe black patients will not adhere to treatment recommendations than their white peers.
- Black and Hispanic patients far less likely to be counseled about smoking cessation than whites.
- Relative to white men, white women were 72% as likely to receive a recommended invasive cardiac procedure, black men 67%, and black women 50%.
IMPLICIT BIAS IN HEALTHCARE:
So what difference does it make?

- Patient-Provider Trust & Relationship is affected
  - One study showed physicians in Pennsylvania exhibited fewer positive, rapport-building nonverbal cues to their non-white patients.
  - Healthcare worker bias is often noted as a factor in delayed screening and disparities in follow-up and treatment between black and white patients.
  - Only 48% of Asian Americans and 47% of African Americans believe that their health care provider understands their background and values.
In All Fairness

Putting a Face on Health Disparities
Discussion

- What impact of implicit bias do you see in your work situation?
- What could I do that might make a difference?
  - As an individual practitioner?
  - As an organizational leader?
How can we assess our own unconscious biases?

- Take Implicit Bias Test: www.projectimplicit.com
The Implicit Bias Test:

- Developed by Harvard University.
- Validated by substantial research
- Now has multiple dimensions of difference available
  - Race
  - Age
  - Religion
  - Size
  - Etc....
- Available online for free by anyone
- Available at: [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias

**Recognize** that everyone has innate/learned preferences and biases.

*Talk to people you trust about yours.*  
*Work with your team members to understand theirs better.*
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias:

- **Counter-stereotypic imaging**: Identify people you admire from a group that raises your biases. Spend time bringing more positive images into your habitual thinking.
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias

Stereotype replacement: When interacting with a person from a stereotyped and/or disadvantaged population, consciously think about positive images from this stigmatized population.

Can you do it?
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias

**Individuation:**
Particularly when working with a person from a population affected by bias, focus on obtaining specific information about that individual, instead of applying stereotypical generalizations. LISTEN

Can you do it?
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias

- **PERSPECTIVE TAKING:** Imagine the actual circumstances of living in the situation of a person who triggers your biases.

- What do they face every morning upon awakening?
- What is the first thing they consider when filling out a job application?
- How do they feel about the safety (and later, judgments) of their children?
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias:

- **Increasing opportunities for contact**: Find common ground for partnership with persons from groups that activate your biases.
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias:

Expand the diversity of the workforce.

Support more people from diverse communities within the health & healthcare workforce.
Strategies to Address Implicit Bias

- Negative emotions and stress may increase stereotyping, so **take conscious steps to manage stress and to heighten awareness** in these situations.
Strategies to Address Unconscious Bias:

- Other ideas or questions?
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