

Broaden your cultural base

Make the most of every encounter with people from a different ethnicity to your own, says Nicola Davies

Today's nursing students are more likely than ever to come into contact with culturally diverse patients and colleagues.

Cultural awareness is not only about ethnicity and race, but also people's socio-economic status, language, gender and religious characteristics.

Increasing your cultural competence can enrich your personal and professional experience. Here are suggestions on how to do it.

Recognise your cultural biases and assumptions

Ethnocentrism – judging people from other cultures using one's own culture as the sole standard – is common and can lead to erroneous assumptions about people. Awareness of your own gender, religious or social class biases helps you to be more alert to and appreciative of different views and ways of relating to each other. The more openness and acceptance you show towards student and nursing colleagues from different backgrounds, the more they are likely to take an interest in you.

Avoid stereotyping

You know that people from your own culture are all individuals in their thinking, tastes and lifestyles. The same goes for people from other cultural groups, therefore colleagues and patients cannot be stereotyped. Stereotyping can work in two ways. Avoid thinking of other cultures as 'different' and do not assume that people from the same social milieu are alike

in their beliefs or values. Limited experience with members of a particular religious group, for example, is no justification for thinking that everyone involved with that religion is the same.

Show a willingness to listen and learn

The best way to become culturally competent is to show fellow nursing students from other cultural or social backgrounds that you are interested in what they have to say, and that you are keen to learn more about where they come from. Listen with undivided attention when you are in conversation with them and share information about yourself when they ask for it. Focusing on listening will go a long way in adding to your knowledge about people from diverse cultures.



Be proactive in self-education

Read and ask around about the healthcare beliefs, ethics and practices of diverse cultures. This will not only broaden your world view and understanding, but it will help to win you respect from fellow students. Many healthcare settings offer foreign language courses or diversity programmes.

Taking such a course will add to your cultural competence as well as your education.

Socialise

When opportunities arise, socialise with culturally diverse colleagues as this can be a revelation. People are more relaxed in an informal environment.

Time away from the pressures and regulations of the work or study environment provide the best opportunities to get to know others as unique individuals.

Seek guidance and advice

Approach student and nursing colleagues who have experience of working in a culturally diverse environment for information and advice. Raise questions or concerns, or simply talk to them if you are curious about something. More experienced colleagues will be happy to assist since they were once students themselves and have a good idea about what you might be thinking **NS**

Nicola Davies is a health psychologist and writer

RESOURCES

Cultural competence in nursing tinyurl.com/Nursetogethercompetence

The clinical placement tinyurl.com/student-guide-placement