



Position Statement #6

Incorporating Education Surrounding Populations with Diversabilities into Nursing Curriculum

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Introduction and Background Information

According to the World Health Organization, over one billion individuals, 15% of the global population, live with diversabilities (2018). The term diversability refers to diversity in an individuals' level of ability, whether it be neurologic, cognitive, intellectual, physical or developmental (Disabled World, 2019). Compared to the general neurotypical and able-bodied population, individuals with diversabilities who seek healthcare go with their needs unmet and pursue healthcare more often (WHO, 2018). The health of individuals with diversabilities is rarely addressed by health promotion and primary prevention services, increasing their vulnerability to experiencing significant health disparities (WHO, 2018).

Barriers to accessing healthcare services include cost of services, limited accessibility, physical barriers, and the lack of knowledge of healthcare workers (WHO, 2018). Due to a lack of knowledge of healthcare provides, patients may have traumatic healthcare experiences and may encounter negative attitudes from staff (Ali, Scior, Ratti, Strydom & King, 2013). Other significant barriers to accessing healthcare services include difficulty in communicating with healthcare practitioners, miscommunication between healthcare staff and carers of the individual with a disability, and the lack of support for carers in the healthcare system (Ali et al., 2013). According to Connell (1998), patients with disabilities "want someone who seeks to understand not only their disease, but their experience of illness – the composite of the patient's views, feelings, and responses to disease, and its effects on the patient's life and the lives of those with whom they relate" (p. 83). Due to the lack of education of health care provides surrounding individuals with diversabilities, this population faces stigmatization and judgement from their care providers. This cultivates an unsafe space where individuals are treated poorly and are denied care, which can result in premature and potentially avoidable deaths (WHO, 2018). According to article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006);

“[P]ersons with disabilities have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability. [This includes providing] persons with disabilities with the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care and programmes as provided to other persons, including in the area of sexual and



reproductive health and population-based public health programmes... [Health professionals are] require[d] to provide care of the same quality to persons with disabilities as to others, including on the basis of free and informed consent by raising awareness of the human rights, dignity, autonomy and needs of persons with disabilities through training and the promulgation of ethical standards for public and private health care... Discrimination against persons with disabilities in the provision of health insurance, or denial of health care or health services or food and fluids on the basis of disability, shall [be] prevent[ed] and prohibit[ed]". Canada is a signatory member of the CRPD, ratifying their commitment in 2010.

Canadian Nursing Students' Association's Current Position on the Issue

In 2016, CNSA passed the position statement "Accommodation within Clinical Placements for Students with Temporary, Transient, or Sporadic Disability or Injury" (Payette & Delage, 2015). This position statement mainly focused on the rights of students with disabilities who experience barriers to meeting their educational institution's clinical requirements; however, it also outlined CNSA's support of increased awareness of accessibility, disability, and accommodation within the nursing curriculum (Payette & Delage, 2015). This statement is the only current literature within CNSA that supports the inalienable rights of persons with disabilities.

This current position supports CNSA's strategic objective B: "Influence and advance innovation and social justice in the nursing curriculum and the nursing profession". By advocating for positive, evidence-based curriculum change, CNSA is being involved in curriculum decisions, planning and review, and incorporating research and evidence-based decision making into their current and future practice to positively influence patient outcomes (CNSA, 2016). Education regarding the numerous diversabilities and the nursing considerations for these populations is vital for the growth of the nursing profession.

Due to the negative impact that uneducated health professionals can have on the health and mortality of people with diversabilities, CNSA believes that nursing curriculum must include education on how to support the needs of this population.

CNSA recognizes that it is the duty of the nurse to advocate for the unique needs of every patient they support, including patients with a wide variety of abilities and disabilities. However, nurses cannot hope to adequately support people with diversabilities if they are not equipped with the knowledge and tools to do so.

Relation to Canadian Nursing School Curriculums

The current nursing curriculum does not adequately address the unique needs of individuals with diversabilities, and it does not prepare nurses with the knowledge, skill and relational practice to safely care for these individuals. According to Troller et al., "if nurses



develop skills and knowledge to modify their assessment and treatment practices, and to manage challenging behaviour, post-registration they will be more likely to detect physical and mental health conditions in this population, deliver more effective treatments, and provide more positive healthcare experiences. In short, they will be in a better position to help address these inequalities” (2017).

A study reviewing nursing textbooks for disability-related content found that the textbooks lacked adequate information on the health needs and nursing considerations when caring for an individual with diversabilities (Smeltzer, Robinson-Smith, Dolen, Duffin & Al-Maqbali., 2010). While some textbooks included more education than others, the consensus of the study was that the available information was not reflective of the population size (Smeltzer et al., 2010).

Health care programs rarely include how to address the needs of people with intellectual disabilities in their curriculum, which leaves graduates unequipped to meet the unique challenges that people with intellectual disabilities face, especially in acute care settings (Trollor et al., 2016), a relevant barrier to all individuals with diversabilities. As the largest profession within health care, nurses are pivotal in ensuring that people with disabilities receive appropriate health care services, including health promotion, disease detection, and treatment (Trollor et al., 2016). However, nurses are among the many health professionals not getting the education required to fulfill this role.

Many countries around the world offer specialized training for nurses who wish to work exclusively with people with diversabilities. Research has shown that a lack of exposure to nursing specialties during undergraduate education leads to a lack of graduate nurses seeking to practice in those areas (Happell, 2010). In Canada, several nursing organizations provide post-baccalaureate education and certification, such as the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN). CNA is the largest organization that offers certification, yet they do not currently provide any resources for nurses seeking to further their knowledge surrounding people with diversabilities. CASN also offers certifications for nurses in addition to outlining the accreditation framework required of nursing schools, but they offer no material specifically for nurses who support people with diversabilities. There are some private institutions in Canada, for example St. Francis Xavier University, that offer additional education regarding how to best support people with intellectual disabilities through their health care journey, however, many are phasing out their programs due to declining enrollment.

Conclusion and Restatement of the CNSA Position

The CNSA recognizes that adequately preparing nursing students to care for people with diversabilities is not currently a part of the nursing curriculum, which contributes significantly to

the inequitable health outcomes experienced by this population. It is crucial for nurses to have the education that ensures patients with diversabilities are receiving safe, compassionate and ethical care that are meeting their specific and complex needs to achieve a positive health outcome.

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