Workshop: Recognizing and overcoming unconscious biases

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Overview

• Introduction to the session – 10 minutes
• Case Study: *Worlds Apart* – 30 minutes
  – Discuss how unconscious biases impact care
• Mindfulness exercise – 20 minutes
  – Examine our own unconscious cognitive processes
• Practical applications exercise – 20 minutes
  – Identify an unconscious bias (ideally your own) and explore how it may affect your interactions with people
  – Link to mindfulness exercise
• Open discussion and wrap-up – 10 minutes
Stereotypes and decision-making

• Normal, functional, adaptive (but often unconscious) cognitive process

• Applied most to:
  1) Race  2) gender  3) age

• Activated most often in situations of:
  1) Stress   2) time pressure   3) multi-tasking
“I treat all my patients the same”
(The “not me!” phenomenon)

Providers have unconscious biases that may contribute to racial/ethnic disparities in health care
Exercise #1

Film-Based Case Study - 30 min

- Small group discussion (2-4 people)
- Discuss all of the ways that unconscious biases could potentially impact care and outcomes
- Think broadly and creatively - no right or wrong answers
- Large group debrief
Possible unconscious biases

• Nephrologist may have assumed that he didn’t want a transplant
• “…just going to ruin it anyway”
• May have assumed dialysis was good enough
• Lack of rapport or good communication may be due to unconscious bias or discomfort and avoidance of patient
• Flawed system not questioned by nephrologists or others as it only affects minorities
• Unconscious bias may be ingrained into the minds of patients also so they don’t question the system
• Others from the group…
Take home points

• Biases can arise in a wide range of ways in the clinical setting

• We generally don’t pay attention to these (they’re unconscious), especially if we haven’t been the victims of them ourselves

• These unconscious biases may influence the care we provide patients, so we should try to be more conscious of them
Exercise #2
Mindfulness and Mindful Practice
-- 20 minutes
Raisin exercise

7 Steps
- Preconceived notions
- Look at the raisin
- Feel it
- Smell it
- Put it in your mouth
- Chew it slowly
- Swallow it

Discussion points
- What was interesting about this experience?
- How was it different than the last one?
- What biases did you have about raisins?
- What insights did you have from this experience about biases, recognizing them, and potentially overcoming them?
Take home points

• Being mindful of our preconceived notions (essentially unconscious biases) – in this case about raisins

• Trying to appreciate the newness of an experience – allowing for the possibility of surprise

• Using mindfulness as a way to overcome our preconceptions and essentially take each experience as being completely new – (the “beginners mind”)}
Exercise #3

Practical applications – 20 minutes
Practical applications exercise

• Identify an unconscious bias that you may have based on any characteristic of an individual (race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, profession, socioeconomic status, part of the country, etc.)

  -- Try to relate this to your job if you can

• Explore where the bias comes from - is it conscious or unconscious or somewhere in between?

• Discuss how it could potentially affect your thoughts, behaviors, and interactions with people?

• Link to mindfulness exercise - how could this help?

  Example: Influenza vaccinations
Summary

• We all have unconscious biases of various types - it is part of the way our brains are wired

• These can potentially affect the way we interact with people and can impact health care and health outcomes

• We should each try to identify our own biases and pay careful attention to the way they may influence us

• Mindful practice may help us overcome the negative effects of unconscious biases