Workforce Diversity Toolkit

A Resource for Employers

Anne Chineny Nsonwu, BSN, RN
Background

The United States is a diverse melting pot. It is estimated that by 2043, racial and ethnic minorities will constitute more than half of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). With the nursing profession constituting the largest segment in the U.S. workforce (over 3 million members), increasing diversity in the workforce is crucial (IOM, 2010).

Nurses are on the front line of patient care, yet the progression towards a diverse nursing workforce had been rather slow and overdue (IOM, 2010). Minority groups experience decreased access to health care, worse health outcomes, increased morbidity and mortality, and shorter life expectancy (Shobha & Shanita, 2014). They have poorer health outcomes from diseases like asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and human immunodeficiency syndrome than the majority (Gracia & Jackson, 2014). Having a diverse workforce will increase trust among minority patients and help improve patient outcomes.

More than one-third of the U.S. population identifies as racially/ethnically diverse, yet literature indicates only 16.8% of the nursing workforce come from such background (Bleich et al, 2015). This calls for employers and their leaders to strategize ways to increase nursing diversity, as nurses are not representative of the population they serve.

Nursing leaders need to implement and support initiatives that will help recruit and retain minority nurses in their organizations. Healthcare organizations need to support a workforce that is culturally competent through recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce, a workforce that mirrors the faces and values of the people they serve.

This toolkit has been developed as a resource for healthcare leaders to create awareness and to support the development of workforce diversity plans.

What is diversity?

According to the National League of Nursing [NLN] (2009), diversity is “the development of a culture where individuals and institutions move beyond simple tolerance to embrace and celebrate the richness of our differences” (pg. 1). The definition of diversity is multifaceted; it is not limited to tolerating individual differences in gender and ethnicity and, most importantly, involves conscious practices that involve:

- Understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, culture, and the natural environment;
- Practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own;
- Understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing;
• Recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others;

• Building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination (CUNY - Queensborough Community College).

**Why is diversity important?**

Organizational leaders need to understand the multifaceted nature of diversity as well as acknowledge the need for workforce diversity. An organization that is successful in increasing diversity has a competitive advantage and will be able to recruit and retain the best nurses.

The fact that a diverse nursing workforce will help improve patient outcome cannot be over emphasized (Kagawa-Singer and Kassim-Lakha, 2003). “A diverse healthcare workforce will help to expand healthcare access for the underserved, foster research in neglected areas of societal need, and enrich the pool of policy makers to meet the needs of a diverse population” (Wisconsin Center for Nursing).

**Strategies to improve workforce diversity**

Healthcare organizations can begin by making diversity initiatives a priority. Organizations should not only have diversity reflected in mission statements and core values but also should create an environment that is welcoming to minority staff. Dedicated efforts should be made in recruitment and retention of minority nurses. This will require use of creative and innovative strategies.

A recent literature review identified strategies for successful recruiting and retention of minority nurses. They include, mentorship, working with community partners and providing academic and financial support (Phillips, J. and Malone, B. 2014).

The following table highlights key objectives for healthcare organizations and educational institutes in increasing workforce diversity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make diversity an organizational priority &amp; system-wide approach.</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Include diversity in the institution’s mission statement, core values, and strategic plan.</td>
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<td>• Support diversity-specific departments, positions, or councils.</td>
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<td>• Establish an organizational structure that ensures accountability for recruiting and retaining a diverse nursing staff and/or student population.</td>
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<td>• Focus on student recruitment at earlier stages of educational progression.</td>
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<td>• Create mechanisms to support the success and retention of underrepresented populations.</td>
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<td>• Establish collaborative academic-practice-community partnerships among schools and healthcare, community, and consumer organizations.</td>
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• Dedicate efforts to seek funding to support diversity growth through innovative approaches and outreach to new philanthropy sources.

• Set goals for attainment of specified metrics in diversity to track data and evaluate outcomes.

**Provide a variety of support mechanisms for underrepresented populations in both academic and practice settings.**

• Provide specific programs that support underrepresented populations, e.g. mentoring, coaching, student/employee academic & employment resources, and social networks.

• Develop support systems for assimilation of underrepresented populations into the workplace.

• Offer funding support for academic education and continuing education of staff.

• Establish interdisciplinary approaches for collaboration with admissions, human resources, and other educational departments for obtaining data on enrolled underrepresented students to assess the types of support needed for success.

**Train all staff and students to ensure higher levels of cultural competency.**

• Require cross-cultural competency training and/or courses for all students, faculty, and staff, including specific courses and programs on cultural awareness and building and maintaining positive interracial relationships.

• Establish peer mentoring for faculty, students, and staff to encourage and support diversity initiatives and maintain effective interpersonal behaviors.

• Host system-wide diversity events.

Source: (Wisconsin Center for Nursing)

To assist healthcare organizations in creating diversity plans, healthcare leaders should ask the following questions:

• What retention strategies have been implemented to retain and promote the success of faculty and staff from underrepresented groups?

• Which recruitment and retention strategies have been most successful? Which have been least successful?

• What is the advertising and outreach strategy employed in the recruitment of employees from underrepresented groups?

• Is there an assessment procedure in place to gauge the outcomes of the recruitment and retention process?
What strategies are employed to maintain relationships with community organizations?

How are outcomes of partnerships with community organizations evaluated?

Is there a formal mentoring program for diverse employees?

What strategies are in place to retain diverse leaders?

What strategies are employed to identify underrepresented groups with leadership potential and the necessary qualifications to achieve leadership positions?

What percentage of the institution’s administrative leaders do nurse educators represent from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups? (National League for Nursing, 2009).

Nursing leaders and managers play a huge role in an organization’s diversity efforts. Preparing minority nurses in leadership positions will help in the effort to reduce health disparity. “Minority nurses in influential leadership roles are more likely to be better positioned to directly influence resources allocation and the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce” (Phillips, J. and Malone, B. 2014).

Some organizations have programs created for the sole purpose of increasing workforce diversity. These programs promote inclusion by encouraging participation of the employees in the program and making it clear to them that their voices matter. They are set up to provide mentorship as well as financial support to the minority employees in the program.

In educational settings, there are nursing programs created to increase diversity by establishing a pathway for LPN-to-BSN degrees. These programs support minorities in obtaining higher degree, which increases their chances of getting employed in hospitals or other healthcare organizations.

Diversity of the nursing workforce is an issue that demands attention. Healthcare organizations need to take active measures to recruit and retain minority nurses. With the growing diversity of the US population, it is crucial for healthcare organizations to have a nursing workforce that mirrors the people they serve.

Diversity program examples

- Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Centers for Faculty Development & Diversity. [http://www.brighamandwomens.org/medical_professionals/career/cfdd/default.aspx](http://www.brighamandwomens.org/medical_professionals/career/cfdd/default.aspx)

• Fitchburg State University. Nursing LPN-to-BSN. 
http://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/undergraduate-day-programs/nursing/

• Massachusetts General Hospital. Diversity Program. 
http://www.mghpcs.org/pcs/Programs/diversity.asp


• Worcester State University. Nursing LPN to BS. 
http://www.worcester.edu/LPN-BS/

Resources on diversity strategies


• Diversity Templates

• Diversity Policy Template


**Resources on diversity leadership**


**Other Resources**

- Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing’s Future/American Association of Colleges of Nursing Minority Nurse Faculty Scholars Program. http://www.aacn.nche.edu/students/scholarships/minority

- MinorityNurse.com http://www.minoritynurse.com


U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and services Administration, Bureau of Health Professions diversity grant programs. [http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/grants/diversity](http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/grants/diversity)

References


