Lessons from the homeless: Impact of civil and uncivil interactions with nurses in the United States

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Disclosure

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- **Learner Objectives**
  - Learners will be able to discuss homeless people’s perceptions of their interactions with nurses
  - Learners will be able to explain the impact of civility and incivility on care of the homeless
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Background

- Homeless people have poorer health than general population worldwide
  - Mortality rates for chronically homeless are higher than expected
  - Homeless people live, on average, 42 - 52 years
- Factors leading to increased morbidity and mortality include
  - Lack of insurance
  - Poor nutrition
  - Violence
  - Inadequate living conditions
- Nurses’ attitudes and uncivil behavior may negatively impact this vulnerable population
The **purposes** of this study:
- To explore homeless people’s perceptions of their interactions with nurses
- To ultimately help nurses understand the impact of civility and incivility on their care of the homeless

**Theoretical Framework**
- Leininger’s (1991) Culture Care Diversity and Universality Theory and Sunrise Model guided this study and data analysis
Method: Qualitative Study

- **Setting**
  - Homeless ministry in a community of 120,000 in the Midwestern United States

- **Subjects**
  - Ten homeless men; five homeless women
  - Age range 18 to 53 years
  - Race: 10 Caucasian, 5 African American
  - Education
    - 5 < HS, 8 HS/GED, 1 “some college,” 1 AD
  - Homeless: <1 to >30 years
  - Lived in
    - Cemeteries
    - Abandoned buildings
    - Parking garages
    - Woods and homeless camps
Method: Procedure

- Interview tool
  - Developed by the researchers
  - Comprised of broad questions with open-ended prompts
- Human subjects protection obtained
- Recruitment
  - A researcher attended ministry activities over six months
  - Invited potential participants to join the study.
- Subjects escorted to private room
- Informed consent obtained
- Demographics obtained
- Audiotaped interviews conducted
- $15 gift card & 2 bus passes
Findings: 3 Major Themes

1. Nurses should be civil in their interactions with the homeless
2. Homeless people rely heavily on self-care
3. Homeless people are prevented from obtaining good health care
Nurses should be civil in their interactions with the homeless:

- Listen to me
- Take me seriously
- Treat me with compassion and empathy
- Be attentive
- Be respectful and fair
- Don’t judge me
- Nurses should enjoy what they do
Theme 1

• **Listen to me:**
  - “I had this weird, bull’s eye circle around [a tick bite]. They completely ignored me. They wouldn’t run a Lyme test. She asked me, ‘What, did you find that on google or something?’ I started getting a little loud just to get someone’s attention.”

• **Show compassion:**
  - One young man described undergoing a painful procedure; The nurse “told me what he was doing and how it would benefit me. He continued to ask me, ‘Do you want me to proceed?’ … Otherwise, I would have been like, ‘Oh my God, he is forcing me. What is he doing?””
Theme 1

- **Be attentive:**
  - A man who had been homeless for many years talked about his typical out-patient encounter. “You wait for hours then when I say, ‘is my name on the list?’ They say, ‘Well, no. You just go sit down.’ You get attitude.”

- **Show some respect:**
  - “Makes you feel like you’re just a number. Like, ‘Well, we got him done. Let’s move on to someone who’s more important. Someone who’s paying for it.’”
  - A man who had been homeless his entire adult life said, “It feels real good when you get treated respectful. Especially if they already know that you’re homeless.”
Theme 1

- **Don’t judge me:**
  - “When they find out I’m homeless, they don’t get to know me or my situation. I’m homeless, but I got a job. I work. I’m not like you think.”
  - “She’s wondering when I’m going to get out and start making my life. She got a little too personal. She said, ‘When are you going to settle your life down? Look at you being here.’ Then she went to lunch and I had to wait.”

- **Enjoy what you do:**
  - “Those ED nurses joke. They try to put you at ease.”
  - “They smile. . . They are very friendly. I go to the plasma center because they are nice nurses there.”
  - “Nursing is a calling from God. Be passionate about it. It’s more than a paycheck.”
Themes 2 & 3

- Homeless people rely heavily on self-care
  - Avoid seeking conventional care when possible
  - When they must, they go to:
    - Emergency Departments
    - Clinics for the indigent
    - “Home”
  - What they do to stay healthy:
    - Dry socks, keep warm
    - Orange juice; throat lozenges
  - They can not count on family or friends to provide assistance when ill or injured
- Finances and stigma prevent homeless people from obtaining good health care
Conclusions

- In order to provide care for this vulnerable population:
  - Nurses must understand the obstacles the homeless face when they need healthcare
  - Nurses must realize that their own uncivil behavior poses a significant barrier to compassionate care of the homeless
- Our study provides insight into the ways homeless people want to be treated by those who care for them
- Our findings can guide development of education interventions for nurses and students that will promote better understanding of the healthcare needs of the homeless from their own perspective
Implications for Nursing Education and Research

- Interview undergraduate nursing students as to their attitudes & knowledge of homelessness
- Develop interventions to help nursing students understand the importance of treating the homeless with civility
  - Simulation
  - Immersion
- Evaluate effectiveness of interventions in academic & clinical settings