Chapter 2

Moving From Vertical to Horizontal:
How to Mitigate Unconscious Bias With the IPE Team

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ABSTRACT

Unconscious bias impacts the ability to engage with interprofessional education activities. This bias comes in many forms and occurs for a variety of reasons. This chapter reviews the types of bias that frequently plague IPE and reviews common theories explaining this bias. Theories discussed in this chapter include social identity theory, realistic conflict theory, and Allport's contact theory. The purpose of this chapter is to assist readers with improving IPE engagement and help promote healthier communication among members of the healthcare team.

SECTION 1

Healthcare providers, like most professionals, want to believe that they are bias-free. However, prevailing neuroscience research demonstrates that no one is truly bias-free as many biases are formed throughout life and held at the subconscious level, mainly through societal conditioning, parental conditioning and life experiences. These formative experiences determine how information is consciously and unconsciously processed and categorized. This processing of information is where bias is introduced and where stereotypes are created. How have you categorized information? Have your life experiences created stereotypes or unconscious biases?

Activity 1: What are the first 3 attributes such as characteristics and/or job responsibilities that you think of when you hear the following:

- Pharmacist
- Podiatrist
- Physical Therapist

When you reflected on Pharmacist did you think patient educator and/or administrator of immunizations? Pharmacists educate and counsel patients regarding smoking cessation, blood pressure measurement and cholesterol management and provide immunizations. The 2014 National Pharmacist Workforce Survey report 60% of pharmacists provided medication therapy management and 53% perform immunizations. Does the word podiatrist evoke thoughts of doctor, surgeon and/or wound care specialist? Podiatrists perform surgery, prescribe medications and often lead wound management teams (Bell, 2009). In contradistinction, when you think of Physical Therapist, were your first thoughts massage, sports, and assistive devices such as canes and walkers? Physical therapists have a clinical doctorate, they are front line providers, they work in dental medicine, women's health and the ICU, in addition to "providing cost-effective alternative treatment to many patients who currently undergo surgery and take costly prescription drugs" (APTA). These 3 professions provide an opportunity to begin exploring common stereotyping and bias. These simple and common stereotypes assigned to professions are a form of bias and are detrimental to effective interprofessional education and ultimately interprofessional practice.

What Is Bias?

Bias is defined as "prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair" (Oxford), "an attitude that you have that makes you treat someone in a way that is unfair or different

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