

Understanding Bias: Identity, Stereotyping and the Subconscious

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Naomi Shike, MD, MSc – shike@uw.edu

Take-home Challenges:

1. With your professional group, designate five minutes during a regularly scheduled meeting to practice **bias mindfulness**. Have a different team member present a thought, response, or action noted in the context of his or her own practice since the last meeting that may reflect implicit bias. (Note: it is also useful to discuss instances in which one has been a victim of bias or microaggressions, but this specific activity is intended to focus on one's own implicit biases and resulting behaviors towards others.) The presenter should describe and reflect on the bias that facilitated that thought/response/action.

Explicitly describing the bias raises **awareness** – the first of two key ingredients necessary to engage in behavior change.

Next, as a group, identify why the thought, response, or behavior raises **concern** – the second key ingredient in eliciting behavior change. What are some potential unintended consequences of the presenter's example?

As a group, practice one or more data-driven strategies to change behaviors associated with bias, in reference to the example described by the presenter. As you discuss these strategies, consider how the strategy being practiced could change one's response in a scenario similar to what has been described:

1. **Counter-stereotypic imaging** – List people who do not fit with a commonly held stereotype that underlies the bias that has been described.
2. **Perspective taking** – Consider the experience that the person described by the participant may be having surrounding the interaction.
3. **Individuating** – Focus on specific characteristics of the individual rather than characteristics that tend to belong to a group that he or she belongs to.
4. **Stereotype replacement** – As the presenter recognizes and labels his or her stereotyped response, discuss as a group how to replace this response with a non-stereotypic response. (In practicing this strategy, it is helpful to draw on strategies 1, 2 and/or 3.)

2. Engage in a 5th data-driven strategy to combat stereotyping and biased behavior: **contact**. Increase contact with out-group members, particularly in situations in which that group forms the majority, and one's own group is in the minority. This is particularly important if you work as a palliative care provider among a community to which you do not belong.

References:

Chapman EN, Kaatz A, Carnes M. Physicians and implicit bias: how doctors may unwittingly perpetuate health care disparities. *J Gen Intern Med.* 2013;28(11):1504–1510.

Devine PG, Forscher PS, Austin AJ, Cox WT. Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. *J Exp Soc Psychol.* 2012;48(6):1267–1278.