Recruitment and Retention of Nursing Students From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

LAURA A. CRAWFORD, MN, RN, Associate Professor of Nursing, BETTY H. OLINGER, EdD, RN, Assistant Professor of Nursing, Bena College, Bena, Kentucky.

The concept of cultural diversity in nursing addresses both the knowledge of cultural differences that impact on practice and the discrimination that exists in the health-care delivery and educational system against diverse cultural group members. Cultural diversity can be defined as distinctive differences of integrated patterns of human behavior which include thought, speech, and customary beliefs that exist between ethnic groups. The term ethnic groups of color (EPOC) (Branch & Paxton, 1976) can be defined as members of non-caucasian distinct groups that can be distinguished by varied attributes, including color of skin. According to Murdock (1967), there are 892 definable ethnic groups in the world, and many countries have five or more major groups (Said & Simmons, 1976).

The 1980 census indicates that more than 20% of the United States population is composed of racial and ethnic groups: 11.5% blacks; 6.4% Hispanics; and the remaining 2.4% Asians and native Americans. The number of Americans of Asian or Pacific Island origin has increased 120% over the previous decade, while whites grew by 6.4%, blacks by 17.4%, and Hispanics by 60.8%. According to an article in Black Issues in Higher Education (McNaury, 1987), by the year 2020, blacks and Hispanics will make up between 25% and 30% of the American population.

Ethnic groups are underrepresented in the health professions with 9.2% in nursing; 7.2% in the medical profession; 7.5% in dentistry; 4% in optometry; and 8.9% in pharmacy (Walker, 1987). The underrepresentation of ethnic groups is even more significant when one looks at the steadily increasing number of people in the United States from diverse cultural backgrounds compared to the steadily decreasing number of ethnic students entering and graduating from baccalaureate programs since the late 1970s (Christoffell, 1987; Graham, 1987; Orfield, 1986; Wilson & Melendez, 1985).

From a number of perspectives, recruiting students from diverse cultural backgrounds for nursing is an important endeavor. The student has tremendous potential for contributing to nursing education. Enrolling students from different cultural backgrounds into nursing programs increases the potential for diversity of nursing education and increases students’ opportunity for contributing to the nursing profession. According to the literature, a monocultural approach to nursing care is ineffective and unsafe in meeting the needs of a diverse cultural society. It is the recognition, acceptance, and utilization of differences that is so vital in a safe, effective, culturally sensitive nursing practice.

Nurses from EPOC groups are a resource


* Copies of the classroom and clinical peer evaluation tools may be obtained by writing to Joanne Olson, Faculty of Nursing, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario Canada N6A 5C1.
to all members of the health team by helping the providers to understand the clients and their environments and helping the clients understand the health-care system. They are in a very unique position to assist both clients and colleagues. It has been documented that nurses from ethnic groups are at least two times more likely to practice in areas of nursing that serve a culturally diverse population than white nurses (American Nurses' Association, 1986; Carter, 1986). There is an increasing need for EPOC group members to be in nursing, both for the provision of care and the expansion of knowledge.

The strong public and federal commitment of the late 1960s and 1970s, manifested both in rhetoric and in fiscal assistance, has declined in the 1980s. A conservative political era with little priority for issues in cultural diversity education presents nursing and nursing educators with many dilemmas.

**Proposed Interventions**

It is proposed that several things could and should be done to facilitate the recruitment, retention, and graduation of an increased number of culturally diverse students in baccalaureate nursing programs.

- **Determine the level of institutional commitment to include students from diverse cultural backgrounds.** Increased resources will be essential to effectively develop a multicultural and campus-wide educational program. With the increasing demands for scarce resources, efforts by institutions to provide greater access and support to students from diverse cultural backgrounds will be continually challenged.

- **Increase the sensitivity of faculty, staff, and administrators to the needs of EPOC students.** It has been suggested that the attitudes of faculty, staff, and administrators is the most important factor in determining the effectiveness of recruiting and maintaining EPOC students on predominantly white campuses. Student attrition can be decreased in part by involving faculty with positive attitudes toward EPOC students (Christoffel, 1987; Hudopohl & Reed, 1984; McNairy, 1987; Pruitt & Isaac, 1985; Quezada & Jones-Loheyde, 1984).

- **Increase cultural diversity content in the nursing curriculum.** Relative to the inclusion of cultural diversity content in the nursing curriculum, it seems important to consider the diversity of cultures present in the U.S. One of the most important aspects of providing care to culturally diverse groups is to educate the professionals to be culturally sensitive (Olinger, 1987).

- **Develop institutional support services to meet needs of the student population.**
  - **Academic advising.** This was identified as a key factor in retention and satisfaction in college program by white and EPOC students (Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Cowell, 1985; Livingston & Stewart, 1987).
  - **Personal counseling services.** This service becomes extremely important when students feel alienated and overwhelmed in a new environment. The counselor needs to be sensitive to the tremendous diversity within the different ethnic groups.

- **Remedial and developmental programs.** Diagnostic testing of student skills and preparation is needed. Development of tests that are free of cultural bias is essential. A variety of teaching strategies related to the cognitive style of the students must be used (Crawford, 1987).

- **Child care centers.** Many of the students from culturally diverse backgrounds are older students with families (Hall, Pollard, & Michelson, 1986; Quezada & Jones-Loheyde, 1984). Child care centers and support services are essential to help students participate effectively in their educational programs.

- **Increase financial resources.** The recent changes in federal aid eligibility seems to have affected the decision to go to college of large numbers of students from low- and middle-income families. Since the mid-1970s, when the emphasis on financial aid shifted from need-based to non-need-based aid to assist middle-income students, the proportion of aid recipients from ethnic groups decreased by 12% (Marks, 1985). Freshmen participation in federally funded Pell Grant programs has dropped by nearly half, from 31.5% in 1980 to 16.9% in 1986. There is a need for more grants, scholarships, and fellowships as well as increased student loan programs (Garibaldi, 1986).

- **Recruit and hire EPOC faculty, staff, and administrators.** It is important to have EPOC faculty, staff, and administrators to serve as role models for ethnic students as well as white students and faculty. Carter (1986) suggests that role models are important to help give students a sense of what they can become. Visiting scholars or faculty exchange programs may provide colleges this assistance until there is adequate representation on campus. It is believed that a larger number of ethnic faculty/staff/administrators will add a vital dimension to the educational and cultural life and mission of the institution (Pruitt & Isaac, 1985; Taylor, 1986).

- **Extensive orientation program.** It is essential that students understand the academic system and be familiar with the responsibilities of college life. Orientation sessions related to study skill, time management, and institutional policies should be provided.

- **Establish a Multicultural Center.** The director would assist faculty in adding culturally diverse experiences to existing course content. He/she would act as a resource person providing bibliographies, names of consultants, etc. The center also would be involved with student groups and activities.

- **Establish peer support groups.** Peer support should be formally structured through a designated peer counselor (upper classman to lower classman). Dr. George Rhodes, U.S. Department of Education, states that students must learn to use the group study process to be better prepared and to network with other students (Odin, 1987). In addition, student networks and informal support groups should be actively encouraged by providing comfortable and convenient meeting places. Student organizations should also have financial and faculty/administration support. Garibaldi (1986) found that noninvolvement in campus life was one factor in the attrition of ethnic students.

- **Develop linkages between colleges/universities and EPOC students in high school, middle school, and elementary schools.** Colleges and universities must work with the school system to better prepare the students for college. Some of the skills that need to be developed before entering college are: fundamental test taking, analytical/problem solving, reading speed and comprehension, language arts, and vocabulary development. More students need to be encouraged to take the academic track rather than the vocational track. Counselors in high schools and middle schools need more knowledge related to career decision in nursing. Examples of successful outreach programs are summer orientation programs, tutoring for high school students, Upward Bound, and GTE Science Focus programs. The previous recommendations have related primarily to the predominantly white institutions.
but an equally important recommendation is the eleventh recommendation.

- **Provide increased support to the traditional Black institutions (TBI).** It has been found that Black students have a higher retention and graduation rate in the black schools than in predominantly white schools (Fleming, 1984; Garibaldi, 1986). Since more than half of all baccalaureate degrees earned by black students are awarded at TBI, these schools should be strengthened and supported in continuing their work (Garibaldi, 1986).

In summary, many avenues are available for the recruitment and retention of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Some of these require financial support, and others require a more positive philosophical approach. Colleges, universities, and individuals must be willing to do their part in this all-important endeavor.

**References**


