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## **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Nurse Anesthesia: Bridging the Gap**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction of the Problem**

Diversity refers to representation, while inclusion is crucial for attracting diverse talent, promoting participation, fostering innovation, and driving growth (Sherbin & Rashid, 2017). Team diversity encompasses differences in life experiences, beliefs, values, perspectives, resources, relationships, and appearance. Equity ensures equal opportunities for all, while inclusion is achieved when every team member feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. The healthcare sector in the U.S. must adapt to the increasing diversity of the population. Despite the population being predominantly white, minority groups are projected to become the majority by 2043. However, the nurse anesthesia profession lacks diversity, with a significant underrepresentation of minority groups. Nursing leaders recognize the importance of a culturally diverse workforce in providing quality, culturally competent care. Efforts to recruit and retain underrepresented minority groups in nursing programs include financial support, mentoring, community partnerships, minority faculty support, and peer/social support. The lack of diversity in the nurse anesthesia profession challenges student success and patient care. This project aims to raise awareness of the diversity gap in nurse anesthesia and explore its impact on student success. Increasing professional diversity could enhance student diversity and improve patient care outcomes.

### **Project Methods**

This non-experimental quality improvement project involves developing, implementing, and evaluating an informational session for diverse high school students with little to no knowledge of nurse anesthesiology, thus increasing awareness and potential diversity in the

nurse anesthesia field. Following approval from the project stakeholders and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the presentation was held at Upward Bound with survey questions sent before and after the presentation to assess their knowledge about nurse anesthetists. Open and closed-ended questions were used. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to reveal their experiences.

### **Evaluation**

Twenty-seven students from different high schools in the East St. Louis region in Missouri were present for the presentation. Data was collected from participants who self-identified as racial-ethnic minority students. A five-point Likert scale and open-ended questions were used to understand the participants' perception of their knowledge of nurse anesthesia and their role in providing care in the perioperative period.

When asked if they knew what nurse anesthesia was before the presentation, 52% had no idea while 12% felt neutral. After the presentation, 90% agreed that they had a better knowledge of the role of nurse anesthetists in healthcare with 53% agreeing that the presentation increased their interest in the role of advanced nursing.

### **Impact on Practice**

As more individuals from diverse backgrounds become aware of the opportunities available in this field, the profession stands to benefit from a more inclusive and representative workforce. One of the key impacts of increasing awareness among minorities is the potential to address disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. Research has shown that minority patients often experience poorer health outcomes compared to their non-minority counterparts, in part due to a lack of diversity among healthcare providers. By increasing the representation of minorities in

the nurse anesthesia profession, patients from diverse backgrounds may feel more comfortable seeking care and may receive more culturally competent treatment.

Also, increasing awareness of nurse anesthesia among minorities can help address workforce shortages in the field. As the demand for healthcare services continues to grow, there is a need for a diverse and well-trained workforce to meet the needs of patients. By attracting more individuals from minority backgrounds to the profession, the field can benefit from a wider pool of talent and perspectives.

### **Conclusion**

Increasing awareness of the nurse anesthesia profession among minorities can improve healthcare access, outcomes, and workforce diversity. By promoting inclusivity and representation in the field, we can work towards a more equitable and effective healthcare system for all individuals.