

# Cultivating Self-Awareness to Address Disparities in Healthcare Settings

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As we navigate our professional roles and interactions in the workplace, it is important to prioritize time for self-awareness and reflection. Increasing mindfulness, awareness, and reflection in our work can help reduce medical errors in healthcare<sup>1</sup> and reduce burnout<sup>2</sup>. Increasing self-awareness can help us better understand our own explicit and implicit biases. Subsequently, we can enhance our understanding of how these biases impact patient care and perpetuate inequitable systems.

## What does cultivating self-awareness look like?

- Building in brief moments of time throughout your work day to process decision making on the unit
- Reflecting on the current realities for the families in our care
- Considering how our clinical care is impacted by our own experiences, history, daily functioning, and implicit/explicit biases
- Talking with colleagues about how unit protocols affect interactions with families and may perpetuate inequities
- Finding ways to manage discomfort that may arise when navigating cultural differences
- Working to acknowledge and make sense of our reactions on the unit



## Why is increasing self-awareness important?

- Practicing self-reflection and awareness about our behavior as professionals can help us change our behavior to address long-held misconceptions and beliefs about groups of people
- Increasing self-awareness can help cultivate humility when faced with ethical dilemmas and patient reactions on the unit
- Shifting our thoughts and actions can help us address inequities in healthcare

## What do I do if I get stuck?

1. **Consult with your colleagues** - Ask them how they've addressed disparities in their own work
2. **Evolve over time** - Give yourself the freedom to change your approach and widen your perspective as new themes and situations emerge
3. **Notice your reaction** - When things calm down, take time to think about what you wish you had done differently to better align with your professional values
4. **Forget perfection** - Practice self-compassion when feeling discouraged
5. **Invest in learning** - Seek to understand more about health disparities, systemic inequities, and implicit biases

1. Pezzolesi, C., Ghaleb, M., Kostrzewski, A., & Dhillon, S. (2013). Is mindful reflective practice the way forward to reduce medication errors?. *International Journal of Pharmacy Practice*, 21(6), 413-416.

2. Salvado, M., Marques, D. L., Pires, I. M., & Silva, N. M. (2021, October). Mindfulness-Based Interventions to Reduce Burnout in Primary Healthcare Professionals: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 9, No. 10, p. 1342). MDPI.



# Cultivating Self-Awareness: Reflections

In order to build equitable systems and reduce health disparities, medical teams benefit from reflecting on and understanding our professional decision-making and behavior. The following questions can help you to reflect on your role in addressing inequities:

**1** Examples of the way my social identities intersect with the families I serve include:

**2** Some blind spots I have exhibited in my professional work in the past include:

**3** When responding to patients who have identities and backgrounds different from my own, I struggle with:

**4** Colleagues and patients' families notice my social powers (education, position, training, expertise, etc.) when I:

**5** I continue to learn about present realities for patients with various oppressed identities by:

