

6.9 Indigenous nursing



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6.9.1 An overview of Indigenous nursing

There have been many reports, publications, texts and media stories about the poor status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. The opportunity to undertake a placement in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health organisation and/or in a clinical area that provides health services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples is valuable learning opportunity that will help you to better understand the culture, history and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This will help you in your journey towards becoming culturally safe.

Your clinical placement could be in an Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) or a public health facility or service or both. AMSs are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCHOs), and are governed by a Board that is elected by the local community. AMSs are funded by Commonwealth and State health and provide primary healthcare services based on a holistic approach. Health services offered by AMSs may vary from service to service, but there are commonalities. For example, the service planning is person- and community-centred and based on community need.

6.9.2 Preparation for the placement

As a student the aim is to learn as much as you can from the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and those that provide services to the community. It is important to research the services and community prior to commencing the placement to ensure that you have an understanding of the protocols for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community. You might like to consider seeking advice from Aboriginal health workers, Aboriginal nurses, Indigenous advisors at the university or other members of the community or talk to other students that have completed clinical placements in that or a similar organisation. This will give

you an understanding of the community and/or organisation you will be working in.

6.9.3 Challenges students may encounter

It is important to approach clinical placement in an Indigenous nursing context with an open mind. You may well find your concept of health and healthcare challenged by your experiences.

In order to meet these challenges and to be effective in delivering appropriate care to Indigenous people, you will need:

- awareness of important Indigenous issues, such as cultural differences, specific aspects of Indigenous history and its impact on Indigenous peoples in contemporary Australian society;
- the skills to interact and communicate sensitively and effectively with Indigenous clients;
- the desire or motivation to be successful in your interactions with Indigenous peoples, in order to improve access, service delivery and client outcomes (Farrelly & Lumby 2009).

6.9.4 Learning opportunities

The type of placement will vary depending on the services offered by your host. You may have an opportunity to work in clinics at the AMS, attend outreach clinics, accompany an Aboriginal health worker or community nurse on home visits or attend community education programs. Occasionally, during these placements there will be no registered nurses to work with you and you may be asked to work with other health-service providers, such as Aboriginal health workers who have a wealth of knowledge about both Aboriginal health and the community.

Ensure that you are respectful of local protocols and practices and if you are unsure of what they are it is best to ask. For example, some organisations may require you to wear a uniform and others may not. Ensure that if a uniform is not required you know what clothing is appropriate. During the placement you may be asked to wait in a different area or not attend a home visit or to leave the room. This could be because of traditional or cultural practices, such as the care of an elder, or men's or women's business, and should not be taken as a personal issue.

So what does this all mean to you as a student nurse? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is everybody's business. A culturally safe workforce will, in the short, medium and the long term, improve the health outcomes for Indigenous people by providing culturally appropriate health-care services. This will, in turn, improve access to those services and we all play a role in making that happen.

Go into your placement without any assumptions or expectations. Use the placement as an opportunity to learn as much as you can, not only from a clinical perspective, but from a cultural and historical perspective to broaden your knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the long term it is you and your peers that will be playing a major role in closing the gap in the life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people.

References

Farrelly T, Lumby B. A best practice approach to cultural competence training. *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*. 2009;33(5);14–22.

Useful links

<www.naccho.org.au>.

<www.indignet.com.au/catsin>.

<www.aida.org.au>.

Useful reading

Eckermann A, et al. *Binan Goonj: Bridging Cultures in Aboriginal Health*. 3rd edn. Chatswood, Sydney, NSW: Elsevier; 2010.

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