

Reckoning With Racism in Nursing

Austin Nation Transcript

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We're addressing

racism in nursing

I'm an assistant professor at

a university here

in Orange County, California.

I've been a nurse for about 20 years.

My whole life,

I guess, is what I would say.

I love nursing, frankly.

I

work in the Red Cross.

And high school

and that just that passion

and that desire just to help others

that's stirred my spirit

at a very young age.

I found my calling to nursing,

which was odd

my grandmother had done it.

My older sister had done it.

She kind of got me my first job

starting, you know,

working in the med surge area

and then moving my way up in rank

as charge nurse.

And now I work as supervisor.

I continue in that role

even and in addition to my academic role,

there are many

what they call fossilized faculty

people who teach

in particularly in health care but

haven't really practiced

in a number of years.

As I'm teaching the next generation

of nurses, it's important

for me to also be relevant

and current

in terms of my clinical practice.

[I] grew up in

Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Parents divorced at a young age.

There was a lot of violence in my home

growing up.

I would say parents were not

very cordial with one another.

My mom was very concerned

about appearances

what we look like

when we went out the door,

but what was going on behind

the door was a different story.

I'm the only one of my family to go to college.

I'm the sort of the first generation

to do this in my family

was the lack of support

in trying

to, for me,

get it,

make a better life for myself,

get out of the ghetto as I saw it.

They thought I was being bougie.

They thought

I was getting too much education.

I wanted to be the one

in my generation

to sort of set the tone

for my nieces and nephews.

I was just kind of always odd man out.

Part of that oddness, as I later

discovered, had a lot

to do with my sexuality.

I identify now as queer gay,

depending on how the mood is.

And that has been sort of a rift

in my family.

There has been religious

differences in my family.

I was raised Catholic,

even though they don't get it.

I think now

I think they're really proud of the PhD

thing.

I think now they like the doctor thing.

Racism started in my

nursing school

with my director back in .

Short woman

never forget her

said to me Nations with an S,

I don't know what you're doing here.

And that was her welcome when she saw me

somehow with this D

high school student

got put into this ADN program.

Ironically enough,

I ended up with her at our last class.

She taught the last class

the leadership, our culminating class.

Somehow she ended up

Pinning me, 'get down here big guy.'

And she put the pin on me

and whispered in my ear,

'Oh, I knew you would make it'

I don't get that to this day.

I had three offers

when I graduated from high school,

I had been working

as a nursing assistant forever.

I had challenged the board and got my LVN

while I was in my ADN.

My first job coming out of

the nursing program,

big hospital in L.A.,

brand new nurse graduate.

They accused me of taking narcotics.

I ended up suing them for that one

because I was so upset about that.

I think I had been framed.

I was so excited

when I got the offer

to move up to San Francisco

to go to school there

because I think, Oh, I'm

going up to the gay mecca,

I'm going up to this city

that's going to be incredibly diverse

and open and progressive.

I get there

and I find out that this school

in their hundred years of being

have never had

five black people in their PhD

program at one time.

So they're telling us

that they're watching

us, this little group of us that have

that we're muddling through this program

with great difficulty.

They would have these

little diversity forums

and they want to know what's going on,

but they would make no changes.

They were hanging the diversity banner

out on the out on the street

as if this was

going to be a welcoming place.

And then you get us in there

and then they're,

they're less than welcoming

when we got there.

We'd have our little black student

union group

where we could go and be able

to find support

among ourselves to get through

this, is how we were able

to navigate this.

And had it not been had I not been

in this group of five other

four other women

who said to me,

No, brother,

you ain't going out that way,

I would have been long gone

probably that first year.

This is how they're

welcoming us into the profession.

And this is horrible.

It's absolutely horrible.

Yeah, I survived.

It feels like I survived.

That's what I said. I survived.

Thank God for the love of friends.

Thank God for the love of colleagues

that were there.

This is how they welcome us

at this level.

I wanted to be a part of teaching

the next generation of nursing

this was my dream

Lip service to being supportive.

Diversity, equity, inclusivity,

they say.

Why does my skin color matter

or Why does my gender matter?

If I want to be a nurse,

why am I not welcomed in to do

what it is that I'm there to do?

I do work in

looking at HIV in young black gay men

my nephew tested positive and I'm like, mmm

What's going on with that?

With these young black men?

This epidemic

has been going on for years.

I worked.

I worked as a nurse, like I said, for

and I remember

working at a hospital in Hollywood.

That was my research question.

I knew when I applied there

that there had been faculty

there that had been doing

work over in Africa with HIV

I interviewed with folks

before I got ahead and found my match

and found a faculty that I thought, OK,

she's doing some stuff that I thought

was a good match. And interviewed with her.

Everyone's doing work in Africa.

Well,

what about the black people here

in the hood of San Francisco

that are being impacted by this disease?

No one is doing work in the community

right here locally.

' Well, we're not going

down to that neighborhood,

and you shouldn't either.

It's not safe.'

I'm in recovery now for years,

almost

I'm celebrating

no drugs, no alcohol, no smoking,

quit smoking cigarets

been on a path of sorts,

to find my own sort

of spirituality, religion.

And now I identify as sort of a

born again Christian.

I've been at my church family since .

Incredible place

of healing and support

and love

that I have never experienced before.

My church family

has been incredibly important to my life.

You know, I'm

all about healthy relationships.

Giving relationships

critically important for me

as I move through these

different seasons of my life.

We need more diversity.

That's what we need.

We need to mix this thing up

we still got too many white women.

Structural racism that happens

way downhill.

With trying

to get these kids of color

into these programs,

middle school,

high school,

where these kids

are already at a disadvantage.

They're not

advantaged enough

to have those resources,

those AP classes.

They'll never get the GPA required

to become nursing students.

Our students have GPAs

is above .

And those big classes,

I think that there's a disadvantage

to some degree.

I'm struggling

with that somehow

because I feel like the students,

there's racism among the students, even.

Keep dreaming of the day nursing becomes

/ , like medicine has evolved

over the years.

It was rare to see a female doctor.

When I first started

and nowadays you've got more women

in practicing medicine than and

so what are we doing in nursing

and why haven't we made that shift?

I don't know.

When you get us here,

as I now am aware of having done work

with men in nursing,

now that

you need to

be welcoming. You need to have places and spaces

that are welcoming once you get us here.

Genderizing, I don't know if

that's a word or not, but nurse

as she nurse she she she she she.

I'm sitting in a class.

You got a class with guys in it, nurses

always she she she she.

Why don't nurse can be a 'they'

they have to begin to shift that language

so that it can be more inviting to men.

Perseverance for better life.

I think my own dream, my own

goals, the mentors

that I've had, that love and support

the friends

that I have the love

and support, the family

that I have the love and support

keep me soaring.

They're so proud.

They're so encouraging.

Kindness of strangers

who have lifted me up in this journey,

who have been there

in the most amazing ways.

When I needed it the most.

In times where I think I am struggling

or I am challenged

or I can't take any more

or I've had enough

I find that

there's some

somebody steps in and shows up

in that moment and says, 'No brother,'

they said, 'You ain't going out that way,'

or No, you're valued or No

you need to stay at the table.

There must be a reason.

There's a bigger path here.

So I just keep doing the work.