

Reckoning With Racism in Nursing

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We're addressing racism in nursing

I work at Pacific College of Health and Science,

and that is primarily a Chinese medicine school.

In addition to Chinese medicine, they have a program

that is a holistic nursing program.

And that's where I teach

It wasn't my first choice,

but it was the first demonstration of any sort of career.

My mom's a nurse.

I wanted to be a doctor.

Why? I'm not sure.

But I soon changed my mind

when I was actually signing on the dotted line.

And I thought, well, nursing, like my mom doesn't look so hard

It is much harder than I thought.

Just

as watching as a child, watching my mom do it

fell in love with that oath that we take as nurses that,

you know, to be of service, to be of health in in such

true human to human

heart to heart ways

Bring to the classroom, I think a very unique experience.

Though I was born

right practically right on the Rio Grande River

on the border with Mexico,

but really a mix of both Mexican traditions.

American traditions.

I would even say Texas, Texan traditions.

In Mexico, you're considered American

in many parts of the U.S., you're considered Mexican.

And so you're neither in each one.

But then you're also both. I'm bilingual.

And then that that that sort of culture that create is created

along the border

of sort of same dual experiences trying to fit into both

and how you navigate and negotiate those supposed lines

My grandparents,

both sides are originally from Mexico.

They came to the U.S. and settled on the border

because my mom worked so much.

We often would

stay with my grandmother

when we got sick, and I was somebody that always had tonsillitis.

If I was with my mom, she'd take me to the pediatrician.

But if I was with my grandmother,

she would either pick some herbs and make me take it

some God awful tea

or if there was another situation that she either couldn't handle

or thought would be better handled by somebody else,

she would take me to the local curandera,

who would also give me terrible teas,

but then add some sweeping of my body with branches and as a kid

I didn't know what she was doing.

I just knew that the tea was terrible. But I felt better.

The care and the love that was in part, it made me feel just

so cared for

Western biomedicine, the way we practice it in

this country, is the racist system that we

we kind of shun or even label

the medical, the medicine systems, the healing practices

of other people as alternative.

Well, alternative to what?

Because if we were in their country or in their communities,

bio medicine is the alternative medicine.

Other cultures have a lot to teach us,

and we need to remain open and curious

and humble.

I was one of those people that was thinking that, you know,

my own

the people of my own culture were

unsophisticated and ignorant.

And I was perfectly fine thinking that until I wasn't.

I did all

disparaging of kind of Western biomedicine.

It has saved my life and it has its absolute

benefits,

but it's also quite narrow.

It also is quite sterile

and other traditions, other systems

do other things so much better.

When I go

to nursing school, when I get out, I'm going to come back

and I'm going to serve my community

because these people just are doing these superstitious things

and they don't really know any better.

And, you know, I'll bring them real medicine and get them

well.

They probably do these these things

because they can't afford to go to the doctor.

The attitude of there was some level of of ignorance

in what they did, and I eventually do come back.

Donya Panchita, who was the local Curandera, was one of my patients.

I was so full of myself. In my heart

trying to teach them the right ways.

Unfortunately, Donya Panchita

passed on soon after she came under my care,

as did my grandmother shortly thereafter.

But I still stayed with this idea of saving my community from the

superstitious nonsense.

Part of

my job was going into their homes

and asking to see their medications,

and they would bring these plastic bags

full of pills and bottles and ointments and creams,

things that they were prescribed

or that they were taken or recommended to take.

But they didn't look any better, you know,

they didn't look well.

The thought that would cross

my mind was are not those big bags

of all this stuff

that they're taking supposed to help them feel better

and they don't.

I met a nurse who came in to our class.

Something about all that she was talking about was use of,

you know, these mind body

therapeutic interventions.

I didn't understand it at all, but there was something deeply

familiar.

My PhD research, which I'm doing now,

and I had to pick a topic

and I thought, well, I know it

want it to be with Hispanic population.

That is when I

got the idea, it really was all of a sudden of my grandmother

and what she used to do for me for for my my sisters,

for the neighbors and what the Curandera would do.

It was a huge opening all at once.

And then comes this.

'But people are going to think I'm weird'

As I started reading and looking at this for,

you know, the different class assignments

and continuing to develop the idea I started getting angry,

angry in that it was all so hidden.

When it wasn't hidden it was presented that those people believe

they're the unsophisticated,

you know, indigenous people of Mesoamerica.

In particular.

When I would come across more than just a few

supposedly reputable articles on this topic,

when they would explain

the traditional medicine of Mexico or Mesoamerica,

their sort of foundation would only go back as far as

the colonization.

I wasn't going to accept that

we, and I'll say we because I come from that lineage,

that we didn't have a medicine until it was bestowed upon us

by colonizers.

I'd already been training in all sorts of

of other therapeutic modalities that I thought,

why have I not even looked at my own culture and what they do?

My grandmother isn't a quack.

Donya Panchita wasn't a quack.

I don't know what they were doing,

but it wasn't,

it wasn't harmful.

If anything, it was so much more healing.

Where I'm from in, in Deep South Texas

you mention curandera

or curanderismo,

and you might as well be talking about witches and witchcraft.

I didn't realize how much I really was just trying to fit in

to the to the US culture.

And maybe not because I was shunning the other.

It really wasn't until I started delving more into this

and particularly

when I went to a summer course

in, in New Mexico, on curanderismo,

hosted at the University of New Mexico

that I saw

just this other side and the beauty of the traditions

and the, the science base really for for so much more

we rarely know anything

about their traditional practices or the tools or

you know, what their system,

their ancestral system has to teach us.

Yes, this is for us to be able to better understand

and truly care for our patient

the way the patient centered care wants us to do.

It's also about

maybe we can learn something from those approaches.

If I can help be a bridge

or a liaison or whatever term that sort of looks like

that's what I want to do.

As a gift to my grandmother, and to

the curanderas and to all of these people

that brought it to me.