

Reckoning With Racism in Nursing

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Duration 13:10

We're addressing

racism in nursing

If you

if you think you're too small

to make a difference, try going to bed with a mosquito.

We need to really think about that for ourselves.

Never think of yourself too small to make a difference.

There's a small group of committed people

that can change the world

I was working as a secretary for a medical director

in a health center in Brooklyn,

New York State had a shortage of nurses.

They came up with a program

called Ladders in Nursing Career, Project LINC.

I used to do like payroll and grants

and all that kind of stuff

as the secretary for the medical director.

It was really a lot of the physicians

and some of the other nurses that knew me

that encouraged me to apply.

They said, You know, you're really smart.

You should really consider applying.

That's how I got into

an opportunity

where financially

I was covered via a scholarship to attend school.

One of the things that I remember from the application

was that you can apply for associate's

degree or bachelor's degree.

The administration in the hospital called me

and tried to get me to change my mind

and go for an associates.

The state told them

that they had to call me and offer it to me

because initially they tried to skip me.

If it wasn't for the oversight

they probably would not have given me

the opportunity to go to school.

I distinctly

remember wanting to go to a school

where there was diversity,

so I selected Long Island University, Brooklyn campus.

I wanted to be with people

that look like me from the community.

It was also the first time

that I think I had access to women of color that had

doctoral degrees.

I'll never forget Dr. Hazel, Sam Sanderson.

She was probably one of the first

women of color that I knew

had her doctorate,

and she had also previously served in the military,

and I thought she was like a real badass.

I loved her

I've always been pretty eclectic,

I think, throughout my whole way of thinking.

So I had a real diverse set of colleagues around me.

I did find it

particularly weird

when I would get assigned to hospitals

that were not diverse.

I had to work a little more to be accepted.

I thought being a chameleon

and adjusting to that environment was a good thing.

And so I would switch to what those environments were.

Change the way I look, depending upon the environment.

And later on now, I'm realizing

that was all code switching.

I was selected for a fellowship program,

and I remember having this what I thought

was a beautiful pink suit.

I remember later on that it was

questioned, you

know, that that people were like, Oh, my gosh,

she wore pink suit to that meeting.

I must have really broken a lot of taboos because

I liked my.

I liked using a lot of color

and some of the things that I would wear

and my makeup and all that kind of stuff.

Definitely the red lips were like all the time.

You're always wearing red lipstick.

And I'm like, Yeah, what's wrong with that?

You know, like, those to me were normal.

But yeah, those were subtle, subtle, subtle comments.

Many years later, when we had a reunion

I purposefully wore a pink dress, similar color

to when I was selected,

because I felt like it was my way of

standing my ground and kind of rebelling

Recently, I was on a board

and they were talking about

how do we include new members,

and they were coming up

with all these different criteria for selecting members.

And I said, You need to stop the gatekeeping

and stop being so elitist

because you've had this this process in place.

And you talk about

wanting to have more inclusion

and all these other rules that you're putting in place

is about keeping people out.

And I was courageous enough to say it.

I'm proud I said it.

I feel robbed that through all of this education

up to a doctoral degree,

these discussions never occurred in

in nursing programs.

And so the fact that we never had

these honest discussions

or understanding, you know, structural racism

or how data

continues to pigeonhole us in these categories,

as a researcher,

or that sometimes we're doing more harm than

good with some of the ways

that we use language

or we stigmatize patients like why

why is it

that we didn't have these conversations earlier?

I wish there were more women of color as faculty

and and in leadership, not only faculty.

I'm tired of the conversation of that.

We want women of color in leadership

or that we want to change. You want to change?

Then I want to see your C suite,

the deans, reflected in what you're stating.

You know that we want women of color

to be deans, to be directors.

They'll create a new position,

but then the person doesn't have the authority

or every chance they get, every chance they get.

They remind you of your place.

The nursing trade associations

should also reflect that.

If you look across the board,

it's not really reflected right

If you look at who the leadership

and what the leadership teams are,

it is predominantly white women.

And then when there is an opportunity,

who gets promoted to the role? A white dude.

When I look at it now, I'm looking at

if you're really about change

that I want to see it at the leadership team level,

and that's the bar I'm setting

Not that I want the faculty to just be diverse.

I want the leadership team to look diverse.

It's really important

to talk

about all the different sectors

where nurses have have been making an impact.

The settings in which they work

from being in the community

to being visiting nurse

to working with homeless kids,

to working in the prison system,

to being able to be a midwife

and working with moms

at home, to being,

you know, influencers on certain policies,

to working in private sector,

to working in foundations, and why this preparation of

that we receive is really

I think, often really, really critical

because we are kind of trying

to kind of think of things

holistically, not just one component

You know, it's like in nursing,

every time you get one thing, they ask you

to get one other thing right.

So you get you go,

you have an associate's, oh you need a bachelor's,

you get a bachelor's, oh you need a master's.

You get your master's, you get your doctorate.

Oh, you need a post doc.

Like there's always one other damn hoop, right?

And so

I thought that in my journey when I received my, my,

my doctorate, my Ph.D.

that I had arrived,

I'm no longer going to continue to get questioned

about the credentials

or what I'm bringing to the table.

You should I'm coming to this negotiating table

now with all this experience

and all this background and all this training

I thought it'd be easier.

You know, I thought it wouldn't be as questioned.

And the opposite occurs. I became more of a threat.

I became more of a threat to

white women that were in power,

a very prominent academic organization.

And the

the dean called me into the office

and read a letter to me out loud.

I sat there and I'm thinking to myself,

if I was a white Caucasian male,

never in a million years,

would you have called me in here

to read this letter to me.

And I said it.

You know, it was the feedback that I gave.

And I was like,

how can you sit there

and read something like that to me out loud?

Someone requested I read this to you,

and I was like, Who?

And wouldn't disclose who?

There was no signature on it.

There was no date and didn't want to give me a copy.

I shared it with a colleague that I really trusted.

And she says, You know,

this has nothing to do with you.

It had all to do with that person wanting to show

they had control over you

and to put you in a demeaning position.

It's actually traumatic.

It stays with you.

It becomes part of a stitch in your body.

And while the stitch may have been taken out,

the scar remains

part of taking my power back and my identity back.

And everything else is to speak about it

and not

be quiet about it and say these things happened

and they're inappropriate.

And, you know, *you know* that that's that was wrong

and you decided to do it anyway.

What's funny is that, you know,

later on right,

like a year or two years, three years down the road,

you come into a meeting or a conference or whatever,

and that person's there.

And and I will tell you that they come up

and they're trying to make amends

and to reconcile the situation.

And I'm like, no,

I know who you are, and I don't trust you.

And on the flip side, I want to highlight

that there has been, you know, again,

women that have really helped me a lot,

that are white Caucasian women,

and they have been incredibly supportive

and they model what I want more women,

I think, and men and men,

they model what they're saying. Right.

So there is the person that says something

and you see it in their actions.

You see it in

how they're really incorporating other people

into the work

I know

what it's like to be rejected,

what it is to be on unhire.

And you survive it.

It's those things don't define who I am.

They define more of the organization

and the people that were

in leadership roles, in those in those places

and their issues of control.

I have to set a path, and I don't know who's behind me.

I just know that I'm on that machine

and I have to create the road,

maybe repave the road that someone else

had already opened up for me.

I'm always very much

an advocate for someone who's an underdog

and I think it's because I recognize that when someone,

you know,

supported me

that I have a responsibility to pay it forward

with someone else.

I'm not myopic.

I see that there's a spectrum of issues

that are going on. It's not the one the one answer.

And and for those reasons,

I believe I'm a better leader

and a better nurse and a better researcher.

Because at least I'm aware that I have to be aware.

And and when I don't know something,

I reach out to people and ask questions

because I know that I might fall.

I might fall short and understanding certain things.

So I do like to speak to other people and listen

You've got to find your space where you're,

you know, being built up

and that you're learning and you're feeling

accepted for who you are

and what you bring to the table without judgment.

There's something about when you find yourself

in a room with people that are that share

more of your journey and your culture

creates a safer space

for me to share a potential struggle.