

Reckoning With Racism in Nursing

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We're addressing racism in nursing When I think about who I am, I think about first and foremost about being a mom. I think about the fact that I am a nurse. The fact that I am a lawyer. I think about the fact that I am an educator. I I think about the fact that I'm a boss lady or a boss persay.

And and then I think about and I am a black woman. I'm also Latina.

I was a teen mom. I. My mother was a nurse, by the way. And from what I saw, her experiences being a nurse, that's not something I wanted to do so. But in any event, I was a teen mother, and I came by way of external forces really? That's what I call it. It was, you know, a career that I could get into.

And be able to raise my son with the kind of dignity that I wanted to raise my son. Being such a young mom, This is something that that, you know, that I will be able to get a good job doing. So you know, I always tell people it's, you know, I didn't come into it for the altruistic kind of ways that most people, you know, get into nursing.

And and, you know, so that's how my journey began. Right. It wasn't. That's not the way it stayed. But that's how my my journey in nursing began.

Nursing school, for me, has always been like this, almost like this love hate relationship. I was in my very early twenties when I was in nursing school. It was an older crowd

when I went to nursing school and you know, I also wasn't aware or knowledgeable about the dynamics. Right. Of of the whole deal. So me as a black, young, poor little girl, I wasn't supposed to really get through it.

Right. And and one of the things that they had and they they, you know, they probably still have it is this whole method of weeding people out. But even when you think about weeding people out in nursing school as nurse, as a nurse, you've heard of that. Anyway, it got to be my first class and my second class.

I started clinical. I actually had a teacher in clinical and instructor who was who was a bully. I mean, there's no other words around it. She was a bully, and I was her target. And it was it was horrible. It didn't matter how prepared I was. She was she always had something negative to say to me. I could still right now transport myself back to that room, that med room where this woman came to my face like this, like she was in my face.

I had memorized everything about this patient. And you have to come prepared and you have to read your book. You have to fill out all kinds of stuff. There was no joke going around, so I knew everything. Well, what I didn't know was that she was going to like roll up on me in that med room and ask me a hypothetical.

I was not prepared for a hypothetical OK. I was prepared for my patient. I knew all of her meds. What? You know, things that that went together. Why you should do this this way. But she threw in a hypothetical, and I could not answer that hypothetical and not. And you know what? Here's the thing that I knew the answer, but I was so afraid that I would say the wrong answer that I chose not to speak.

That's how scared I was of this woman. And I literally just just melted. Like, I just. I just froze. And before we left that room, she said she she said she said, you know what?

You failed. You failed this class. I remember there was a white and she was a girl. She was about she was a young girl in the class.

And we were actually friends. We used to go out and stuff together, but she used to come to clinical late all the time. And she didn't tell her anything. So I was, you know, beside myself. I laughed. I was I was crying, you know. And and then later, I don't know if it was that day. Probably not. Probably two days later, I was summoned by the dean in between that time, by the way, and the time I was summoned, I took an exam.

Right. So even though she had kicked me out of clinical, I still had to take an exam and in class. So I took the exam. And when everybody went to go get their grade, there was nothing next to my name. So after that is when I was summoned to the dean's office, she sat me down and she basically told me that that I could not continue there, that I failed the exam.

Number one, besides failing clinical that she found out about that and that I also failed my exam. And she proceeded to tell me how she thought that I would be better off starting off with an LPN program. And, you know, I'll never forget that. I told her, I said, you know, I appreciate you telling me that. Not that there's anything wrong with being an LPN.

My mother's an LPN, but I don't want to be an LPN. That's not what I that's not why I came here for I don't want to be an LPN. And I just remember that was pretty much what I told her. And I walked off. I walked out, and and that was the end of that. Like I just said, OK, well, there goes my nursing dream, right?

And I, I went home and I just remember, you know, talking. I told my stepfather and I'm like, you know, that's it. I'm done. So I was so upset and someone said to me, it must have been my stepdad. He said, you know, go talk to one of the neighbors. So I go to

one of the neighbors house, you know, I'm telling her, you know, what happened and and, you know, and stuff like that.

And, you know, that's it. You know, I'm I'm sad. I don't know what I'm going to do. And she said, well, call the NAACP. That's what you gonna do. That's what you gonna do. And had it not been for that president at that time of the NAACP, who was courageous enough and caring enough to actually make these phone calls, set up a meeting with the president of the entire university had me in that meeting.

And and and the president of the entire university summoned that dean of nursing. And when she proceeded to tell him how I didn't need to know my grade because I failed he said, Oh, you going to show her the grade? When they showed me my scantron, I had not failed that exam. I scored poorly. I did as anyone would have, having had just been kicked out of clinical but I didn't fail.

I just made it made my mind up that from that time on at least to get through that program I wasn't going to let any one of those instructors there, teachers there ever intimidate me to the point that I would just freeze up about anything It's years since I graduated nursing school, and I've never seen this this massive kind of acknowledgment of, of of racism within nursing, of structural racism.

Until now, until just this last year. I think another reason is that even black people, we've become like, I know for me, I'll speak for me, become like a master of dodging that bullet at work. Right. Social you know, socially, you know, talk and say your your stuff but at work, right? In the in the professional, right environment, you just didn't talk about it.

You just kind of normalized a lot of things that now I know it to be you know, these microaggressions and all of this. But I think, you know, if you're asking me why, I mean,

if you don't acknowledge something exists, you know, you can't really talk about it. You can't do anything about it.

So what you know, I just feel like three things need to happen. We need to acknowledge that there is racism. We need to acknowledge that there is structural racism and acknowledge it by talking about it.

We need to be educated about it. I think we need to educate ourselves about racism. People, nurses, white, black, whatever, need to educate themselves about what is antiblack racism. Right. And and really educate ourselves, try to educate ourselves about other nationalities. But I just feel part of it is that we don't know who the rest of us are.

You know, we're all we only we kind of know our story and and and that kind of thing. But I think if we're also more sensitive to other stories, the acknowledgment being educated. And the third thing actually is being able to call it out. Right. I just feel like a lot of people who have like the the privilege.

Right. To and the authority and and I don't know if authority is the correct term, but just, you know, that are in a place where they have impact, where people are looking up to them if they call it out, you know, that is also something that will help in terms of trying to fix this this whole, you know, racist kind of paradigm and just kind of shift things so.

Yeah, so, you know, we have to acknowledge it. We have to be educated and we have to get educated and we have to call it out.