October 13, 2022

A New Resource for Responding to Racist Patient and Visitor Behavior

Last year, Mount Sinai instituted a policy for employees for how to interact with patients and visitors who exhibit racist behavior. Today, we’re writing to share a new, even easier-to-access resource to help everyone have the policy on hand if it’s needed: a printed pocket card outlining the policy and how to put it into action.

For this week’s Bulletin, we spoke to some of the members of the Nurses Against Racism Employee Resource Group and Solidarity in Action, a subgroup of Mount Sinai Morningside’s Shoulder to Shoulder Task Force to support anti-racist policies and practices, who came up with this innovative way to help distribute this critical policy.

Irem Khan, Associate Director, Clinical Operations and Special Projects at Mount Sinai Morningside, told us that the team’s goal was to make this policy actionable and readily available. “Our focus was on specific actions and responses for tough interactions. We wanted to make this information as easily accessible as possible, so that in the inevitable event that a patient or family member is exhibiting racist behavior, our colleagues would have the tools to handle the situation right at their fingertips.”
Conversations with a Patient, Family Member, or Visitor

Mount Sinai does not tolerate racist, biased, or discriminatory behavior toward staff members, learners, or trainees. You are not alone. First elucidate and meet any urgent medical needs. Then report the behavior to your supervisor. Suggested messaging to patients is below.

Patient or family member asks to change staff assignments based on the perceived identity of the provider. Such requests will not be honored, except in rare cases determined by the patient's or nurse administrator.

- "Our policy is to provide care free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or any other bias. Our staff members/trainers are well-trained and committed to providing you with quality care."
- "We have a policy that prohibits discrimination against any person with respect to their race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or any other bias."
- "We are committed to providing you with quality care. Your request has been declined. You will continue to be cared for by your current staff. All of our staff are well-trained in providing high-quality patient care.
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While Irem worked on what this resource would look like, the co-chair of Nurses Against Racism, Marsha Sinanan-Vasishta, MSN, MBA, RN NEA-BC, CPXP, Vice President for Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer at Mount Sinai Morningside, worked on what the pocket guide would say. As with many of the Road Map initiatives, this project has been a collaboration from the start, with Marsha working with colleagues across the system—including in the Office for Diversity and Inclusion, Legal, Talent Development and Learning, Patient Experience, and Marketing and Communications—to get the language just right.
“We realized that we couldn’t just take the language from the policy and put it directly into this guide,” Marsha told us. “It was important for us to get input from other departments and stakeholders to ensure that the information shared in the pocket guide was easily digestible and on message.”

Irem added that the goal was to take an existing resource and make sure it could be available when someone needed it. “This initiative has been a year in the making, and we feel really good about the final product as both a way to help support the policy and share it with a wider audience, and also as reassurance for employees to know that they have the support of the organization behind them to help respond to racist behaviors.”

Pocket Guides are now available in the Brand Center, and we encourage all department leads to place an order for their staff using this link. Additionally, we have uploaded a version of the pocket guide to Mount Sinai Daily and tagged it as an easy-to-find resource. You can find it here. We also encourage anyone who has feedback on this resource to share your thoughts with us at RoadMap@mountsinai.org.

As a reminder, there is also a Talent Development and Learning course titled Responding to Racist and Discriminatory Patient Behaviors for Managers that helps managers practice the skills necessary to address racist or discriminatory behavior by patients and visitors and gain insight into how to best support staff members who are witnesses or targets.

We also hope you’ll consider joining us for some of the following events this week.

All the best,

Angela and Shawn
Join Us for an Upcoming Event

Using Adaptive Dance and Exercise to Improve Outcomes in People With Brain Injury—Join this event on Tuesday, October 18, from 1:30 pm - 2:30 pm. Register here.

Fostering Health Equity for People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities—Join this event on Wednesday, October 19, from 1 pm - 2 pm. Register here.

More events for Disability Awareness Month can be found by logging into Mount Sinai Daily.

Chats for Change: Deeper Dive Series | White Supremacy Culture Characteristics: Progress Is More—Chats for Change is a production of Icahn Mount Sinai’s Racism and Bias Initiative. Is the goal to always be/do/get more and be/do/get bigger? When we believe “progress is more,” we value those who have “progressed” over those who “have not”—whether progress is measured in degrees, grades, money, power, status, or material belongings. Join Leona Hess, PhD, and Alia Barnes, MPH, on Tuesday, October 25, from 12-1 pm as they take a deep dive into how “progress is more” shows up in our work and learning environment and what we can do to counter this white supremacy culture characteristic. Register here.