A Position Statement on
Racism and Racial Discrimination in the Workplace

Definitions

Every health care worker has a right to be free from racial discrimination in the workplace.

Race is a prohibited ground of discrimination in federal and provincial human rights legislation that is not specifically defined. Historically, race has been defined as a natural or biological division of the human species based on physical distinctions including skin colour and other features.

Biological notions of race have been discredited and it is now recognized that race is a socially constructed way of judging, categorizing and creating difference among people with the effect of marginalizing certain groups in society. The process of social construction of race is called racialization.

Racialization extends to people in general but also to specific traits and attributes which are considered to be "abnormal" and of less worth. In addition to physical features, characteristics of people that are commonly racialized include accent or manner of speech, name, clothing and grooming, diet, beliefs and practices, leisure preferences, places of origin and citizenship.

Generally defined, racism is an ideology that either explicitly or implicitly asserts that one racialized group is inherently superior to others. While racism is a social phenomenon, it is racial discrimination that is a legally prohibited act.

Racial discrimination can be impacted by other prohibited grounds such as colour, ethnic origin, ancestry, place of origin, citizenship and creed (religion).

Examples of Racial Discrimination

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions acknowledges that racial discrimination may occur at a number of levels in the workplace. At the individual level, it may be manifest in an individual's actions. At the institutional or systemic level, it may be evident in the structures, policies, procedures and practices of organizations that directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, promote, sustain, or entrench differential advantage for some people and disadvantage others.

Some types of treatment that may be considered racial discrimination include:

- Racial slurs and jokes;
- Intimidation, harassment or violence;
- Exclusion from formal or informal networks;

- Denial of mentoring or developmental opportunities such as secondments and training made available to others;
- Differential management practices such as excessive monitoring and documentation or deviation from written policies or standard practices when dealing with a racialized person;
- Disproportionate blame for an incident;
- Assignment to less desirable positions or job duties;
- Treating normal differences of opinion as confrontational or insubordinate when involved with racialized persons;
- Characterizing normal communication from racialized persons as rude or aggressive;
- Penalizing a racialized person for failing to get along with someone else (e.g. a co-worker or manager), when one of the reasons for the tension is racially discriminatory attitudes or behaviour of the co-worker or manager;
- Infantilizing a racialized person with belittling comments or put-downs;
- Blaming a racialized person for being racially harassed or abused, i.e. blaming the victim.

Racial discrimination demeans individuals, endangers their health and may create poisoned work environments. Nurses subjected to racism may experience low morale, isolation, fatigue, stress and physical or mental illness. They may take extended sick leave or resign their employment.

Position

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions is committed to eliminating racism and racial discrimination in the workplace and urges its Member Unions to take actions in areas including but not limited to the following:

- Membership education;
- Staff anti-racism training;
- Joint education initiatives with nursing organizations and hospital/healthcare associations;
- Strategic collective bargaining to include or improve anti-discrimination and anti-harassment clauses and to include joint human rights committees and pro-active anti-racism programs;
- Urging employers to develop or improve anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies and procedures;
- Urging employers to identify systemic issues and barriers in the workplace and develop effective policies and procedures for their elimination;
- Support mechanisms for individuals experiencing racism in the workplace.

References

Das Gupta, Tania. 2003. Racism in Nursing. Ontario.

Ontario Human Rights Commission. 2005. Policy and Guidelines on Racism and Racial Discrimination.

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