Applying Anthropology To Nursing Essay, Research Paper

Anthropology 201

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Applied Anthropology

Applying Anthropology to Nursing

Medical Anthropology is dedicated to the relationship between human behavior, social life, and health within an anthropological context. It provides a forum for inquiring into how knowledge, meaning, livelihood, power, and resource distribution are shaped and how, in turn, these observable facts go on to shape patterns of disease, experiences of health and illness, and the organization of treatments. It focuses on many different topics including the political ecology of disease, the interface of the micro- and macro-environments that affect health, the politics of responsibility as it relates to health, gender and health, the moral, political and interpersonal contexts of bodily suffering, and the social meanings of disease categories and ideals of health. Focal points also include the cultural and historical conditions that shape medical practices and policies, the social organization of clinical interactions, and the uses and effects of medical technologies.

In applying Anthropology to the profession of nursing I would be looking into health, disease, illness, and sickness in human individuals which would be undertaken from the holistic and cross-cultural perspective. This is distinctive of anthropology as a discipline, that is, with an awareness of their biological, cultural, linguistic, and historical uniformity and variation. As a nurse I would study the health, health problems and human responses which occur as a result of life processes. Emphasis would be placed on the nursing process as a systematic method of assisting clients to attain, regain and maintain maximum functional health status.

Knowledge of cultural diversity is vital at all levels of nursing practice. It is of the utmost importance for me to remember that ethnocentric approaches to nursing practices are ineffective in meeting the health and nursing needs of diverse cultural groups of clients. Having the knowledge about cultures and their impact on interactions with health care is essential for nurses, whether they are practicing in a clinical setting, education, research or administration. Cultural diversity addresses racial and ethnic differences, however, these concepts or features of the human experience are not synonymous. The changing demographics of the nation will continue to increase the cultural diversity of the United States population and those that have up to this point in time that have been considered to be the minority will, combined, constitute a national majority.

The knowledge and skills relating to cultural diversity that I have obtained from my course in Anthropology I believe will help me to be able to strengthen and broaden the health care delivery system. Other cultures are capable of providing examples of a range of alternatives in services, delivery systems, conceptualization of illness, and treatment modalities. Cultural groups often utilize traditional health care providers, identified by and respected within the group. Concepts of illness, wellness, and treatment modalities evolve from a cultural perspective or world view. Concepts of illness, health, and wellness are part of the total cultural belief system.

Knowing that culture is one of the organizing concepts upon which nursing is based and defined, it is important for me to understand:

• how cultural groups understand life processes;

• how cultural groups define health and illness;

• what cultural groups do to maintain wellness;

• what cultural groups believe to be the cause of illness;

• how healers cure and care for members of cultural groups; and

• how the cultural background of the nurse influences the way in which care is delivered.

It would be important for me, as the nurse, to consider specific cultural factors impacting on individual clients and to recognize that intra cultural variation means that each client must be assessed for individual cultural differences.

Nurses bring their personal cultural heritage as well as the cultural and philosophical views of their education into their professional setting. Therefore, it will be important for me, as the nurse, to understand that nurse-patient encounters include the interaction of three cultural systems: the culture of the nurse, the culture of the client, and the culture of the setting. Access to care can be improved by providing culturally relevant, responsive services. Individuals need to have choices of delivery systems in seeking health care. Nurses in clinical practice must use their knowledge of cultural diversity to develop and implement culturally sensitive nursing care. Nurses should, and do, take pride in their role as client advocates. Recognizing cultural diversity, integrating cultural knowledge, and acting, when possible, in a culturally appropriate manner will enable me, the nurse, to be more effective in initiating nursing assessments and serving as a client advocate.

I believe that all nursing curricula should include pertinent information about diverse health care beliefs, values, and practices. Such educational programs would demonstrate to nursing students that cultural beliefs and practices are as integral to the nursing process as are the physical and psycho-social factors. As a nurse administrator I would foster policies and procedures that help to ensure the access to care that accommodates varying cultural beliefs. Nurse administrators need to be knowledgeable about and sensitive to the cultural diversity among providers and consumers. Nurse researchers need to utilize the cross-cultural body of knowledge in order to ask pertinent research questions. Through the exploration of other cultures, nurse researchers and practitioners find that while cultures differ, there are also many similarities among groups. I, upon becoming a nurse, will be in a position to influence professional policies and practice in response to cultural diversity.

Cultural diversity in nursing practice derives its conceptual base from nursing, other cross-cultural health disciplines, and the social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Culture is conceptualized broadly to encompass the belief systems of a variety of groups. Cultural diversity refers to the differences between people based on a shared ideology and valued set of beliefs, norms, customs, and meanings evidenced in a way of life. Culture consists of patterns of behavior acquired and transmitted symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts. The essential core of culture consists of historically derived and selected ideas and especially their attached values. Taking this into account, it is completely understandable why the knowledge of culture is vitally important to the ability of myself, upon becoming a nurse, as well as other health care providers to provide the best health care possible.

The impact of culture as a causative influence on the perceptions, interpretations and behaviors of persons in specific cultural groups is important. Issues such as cultural differences in defining health and in designing treatments are also important. As knowledge of specific cultures is gained, cross-cultural comparison can lead to recognition of possible universal aspects as well.

Ideology is comprised of the ideas of a group, their nature and source, and the doctrines, opinions or ways of thinking of a group. These are attached to an agreed upon set of beliefs or a creed. Values refer to the especially favorable way of regarding the ideas, behaviors, customs, and institutions of a group as desirable, useful, admirable, important, or truthful. Ethnocentrism is the belief that one’s own culture is superior to all others. This belief is common to all cultural groups. All groups regard their own culture as not only the best but also the correct, moral, and only way of life. This belief is pervasive, often unconscious and is imposed on every aspect of day-to-day interaction and practices including health care. It is this attitude which creates problems between nurses and clients of diverse cultural groups.

Of the many things that I have learned during my course in Anthropology 201 and will carry with me into my nursing profession, the understanding of and the respect that must be given when providing health care for people of other cultures is most certainly the most significant. Critical examination of the historical, socio-political, scientific, and cultural influences of a client’s life is essential to providing the best health care possible. Ethnocentrism, though existing to some degree in all cultures, has no place in the nursing profession. One must be able to be as neutral and unprejudiced as possible. I believe the knowledge that I have gained will assist me in becoming the best nurse that I can possibly be regarding cultures other than my own.