

Considerations for Fostering an Antiracist and Equitable Healthcare Environment

Case Study 3

Sandy, who is African American, has a 6-year-old grandson who has a hearing loss. She provides support to her daughter and son-in-law by taking her grandson to medical appointments. She has already had difficulty in the past with clinicians who appeared racially biased in their interactions with her and her grandson, so she was leery of seeing a new specialist. She found a pediatrician who she has developed a supportive, trusting relationship with after several false starts with other clinicians. Her grandson's pediatrician made a referral to new audiologist. However, when she scheduled the telehealth visit with the audiologist, she found him dismissive and demeaning in the video visit – the clinician frequently broke eye contact with the family and seemed distracted. He would not address her questions and concerns and seemed put out that she was a smart, informed consumer who wasn't going to simply accept his recommendations without having her concerns addressed. She abruptly ended the visit with the audiologist and sought a new referral with someone a friend recommended to her. As a result of this failed telehealth visit, Sandy's grandson is now hesitant to use telehealth again.

1. After the visit, how can the clinician reflect on the interaction with the family to identify opportunities for improvement?

It is important for pediatric clinicians to reflect on their interactions with patients/families to ensure they are providing patient-centered care. In doing this, the clinician should first consider their own implicit biases, and if these biases may have impacted interactions with the family. The clinician can also reflect on their communication style and actions taken during the telehealth visit.

Clinicians should always make sure families understand the options presented to them and allow time to answer any questions that may arise. It is important to ask questions about patient/family experiences, barriers, and past experiences with services and clinicians. If a pattern emerges where a pediatric clinician is experiencing families of color leaving their practice, it should raise a concern and possible need for further education, training, and supervision about how to be more welcoming and affirming in their work for non-White families.

2. What are some things that the audiologist could have done differently to create a more welcoming telehealth visit experience for Sandy and her grandson?

There are a few ways in which the audiologist could have created a more welcoming environment for this visit, including:

- Asking about Sandy's previous experiences with her grandson's pediatricians and specialists
- Using strategies for effective telehealth visits, like making eye contact with the camera, actively listening to the family and their concerns, and avoiding distractions in the room
- Leveraging the family's strengths and applauding Sandy's questions – instead of making Sandy feel like her questions were unwelcome or burdensome
- Finding ways to engage directly with the grandson during the visit, in addition to Sandy

3. Experiences of racism and ageism in the health care system has caused this family to feel disrespected and unheard. How can this be avoided in future interactions with other families?

It is important for clinicians to practice cultural humility and awareness, especially with families from diverse backgrounds. Some questions to consider include:

- Does the practice have welcoming signs, photos, and indicators of their inclusiveness and diversity?
- Is the clinic staff representative of the population that the clinic serves?
- Has the staff been provided training on creating a welcoming environment, especially for minoritized populations?
- Do clinicians prioritize establishing relationships with families, including those who may require additional time to have their questions and concerns addressed?
- Is there a post-visit satisfaction survey available so families/caregivers can share their experiences for continuous quality improvement?
- During telehealth visits, do clinicians maintain eye contact and engagement with the family throughout, or do they look away, take notes, or get distracted frequently?

Encourage clinicians within the practice prioritize authenticity and empathy when communicating with all families. Ask questions about previous experiences within the health care system. Creating a welcoming environment for all families is where the work begins and will ensure that the experience is a positive and successful one for all.