

APPENDIX A

Module one: Understanding and addressing implicit bias

We can show implicit (conscious) or explicit (unconscious) bias. We might show bias because of ethnicity, age, gender, appearance, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, or for many other reasons. Becoming conscious of these attitudes and biases is the first step towards change.

This first module looks at what implicit bias is, and how to identify and address it.

People featured in this module are:

- introduction and purpose of module one (Anton Blank, bias expert)
- clinician story of implicit bias (Kyle Eggleton, Northland GP)
- clinician story of bias (Inia Tomas, emergency department consultant)
- what is implicit bias? (Carla Houkamau, associate professor, University of Auckland)
- identifying and addressing implicit bias, individuals (Anton Blank).

What is implicit bias?

The human mind has evolved to form impressions of other people and categorise them instantaneously. It is a protective function. We are bombarded with a huge amount of information and suffer from cognitive overload. We need to be able to determine whether someone is warm and approachable, attractive, someone we can trust, or someone who is going to be dominant. Our brains have therefore evolved to associate people instantaneously with stereotypes in order to make sense of the social world.

Unfortunately, we tend to do that without really being conscious of it, and the implication is that we can act in a discriminatory way without really meaning to.¹

Defining implicit bias

There are lots of different ways to define implicit bias but, in this context, it is most easily understood as being a distortion in perception that people have in relation to particular groups of people. This distortion can result in behaviours which have a discriminatory impact, and then the discrimination itself becomes a problem. Implicit bias is a type of bias that people aren't fully conscious of.²

Implicit associations

Implicit associations are a scientific term for the relationships people make between a thing, a person, an object, a situation, and a thought or feeling they have in their mind – something that is physiologically in your brain. Our brain makes associations between ideas and things, called implicit associations. In social psychology, we understand that people generally have an affinity to people who are like themselves, people within their own 'in group'. That group will change depending on the situation, but it can be related to ethnicity, age or gender.^{3,4}

¹Banaji, MR, Greenwald AG. (2016). *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York, NY: Bantam.

² *Ibid*

³Banaji, MR, Greenwald AG. (2016). *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York, NY: Bantam.

⁴FitzGerald C, & Hurst S. (2017). Implicit bias in healthcare professionals: a systematic review. *BMC medical ethics*, 18(1), 19. doi:10.1186/s12910-017-0179-8.

Societal stereotypes

Societal stereotypes can affect the way we see other people. For example, there is a lot of research that shows stereotypes around the elderly affect the way we perceive older people and what they are competent and able to do. There are also stereotypes around gender that affect how people perhaps perceive leadership as being a masculine quality and nurturing a female quality.

All these stereotypes exist in society, and the idea of implicit bias is that we internalise them into our minds without really being consciously aware of them. That's really important in understanding discrimination.

Research into medical students' biases

The University of Auckland researched the attitudes medical students have towards Pākehā, European and Māori clients. They found that medical students have pro-European and pro-Pākehā biases. These are largely implicit. They also have implicit biases around Māori, and these relate to the idea that Māori are less compliant.⁵

If you are a doctor or other health care provider and suspect your client might not be as compliant if you give them instructions or medication, that can have negative implications for your patient and their outcomes because it means they're not getting the proactive care they require.⁶

– Dr Carla Houkamau, associate professor, University of Auckland

What is explicit bias?

Explicit bias refers to the attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious and overt level.⁷

Countering implicit bias for individuals

Strategies that show promise in countering implicit bias for individuals include:

- contrasting negative stereotypes with specific positive examples
- seeing people as individuals rather than stereotypical members of their ethnic or social group
- seeing things from the perspective of the person who is being stereotyped
- mixing with members of other ethnic and social groups
- exposing yourself to media that aims to break down prejudice and discrimination
- treating people both as individuals and part of their wider family and whānau.

⁵Cormack D, Harris R, Stanley J, Lacey, Jones R, Curtis E. (2018). Ethnic bias amongst medical students in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Findings from the Bias and Decision Making in Medicine (BDMM) study. *PLOS ONE*, 13(8), e0201168. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0201168.

⁶Houkamau, C. (2016). What you can't see can hurt you: How does stereotyping, implicit bias and stereotype threat affect Māori health? *MAI Journal: A New Zealand of Indigenous Scholarship*, 5(2). 10.20507/MAIJournal.2016.5.2.3.

⁷Green AR, Carney DR, Pallin, DJ, Ngo, LH, Raymond KL, Lezzoni, LI, Banaji, MR. (2007). Implicit bias among physicians and its prediction of thrombolysis decisions for black and white patients. *Journal of general internal medicine*, 22(9), 1231–1238. doi:10.1007/s11606-007-0258-5.

See Lai et al (2014)⁸ for a review of specific interventions.

While there are things that can be done at the individual level, there is also the need to make changes at an organisational level (see module two).

– Anton Blank, bias expert

Bias brain and mindful brain

This model proposes that there are two systems of thinking: bias brain and mindful brain.

- Bias brain is triggered by our implicit biases. Our thinking is automatic, fast, judgemental and unkind. When we are under pressure, we are more likely to be operating in bias brain.
- Mindful brain helps people to detach from their emotions, which is where biases are stored. They can then make more considered, thoughtful and balanced decisions. This is especially important for professionals working under pressure because research shows that this is when bias is most likely to drive decision making.

– Anton Blank, bias expert

Take an implicit bias test

Psychologists at Harvard, the University of Virginia and the University of Washington created Project Implicit to develop hidden bias tests – called implicit association tests, or IATs – to measure unconscious bias.

You can take these free tests [here](#).

See also:

- Harris R. (2018). Is your unconscious ethnic bias impacting on Māori patient care? *Health Central* opinion piece. Available at <http://healthcentral.nz/opinion-ricci-harris-is-your-unconscious-ethnic-bias-impacting-on-Māori-patient-care/>
- Is implicit racial bias affecting the way we treat our patients? Article in *GP Pulse* Dec 2016, issue 58, 12-13.

⁸Lai, CK, Marini, M, Lehr, SA, Cerruti, C, Shin, JL, Joy-Gaba, JA, Nosek, BA. (2014). Reducing implicit racial preferences: I. A comparative investigation of 17 interventions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(4), 1765-1785. doi:10.1037/a0036260.