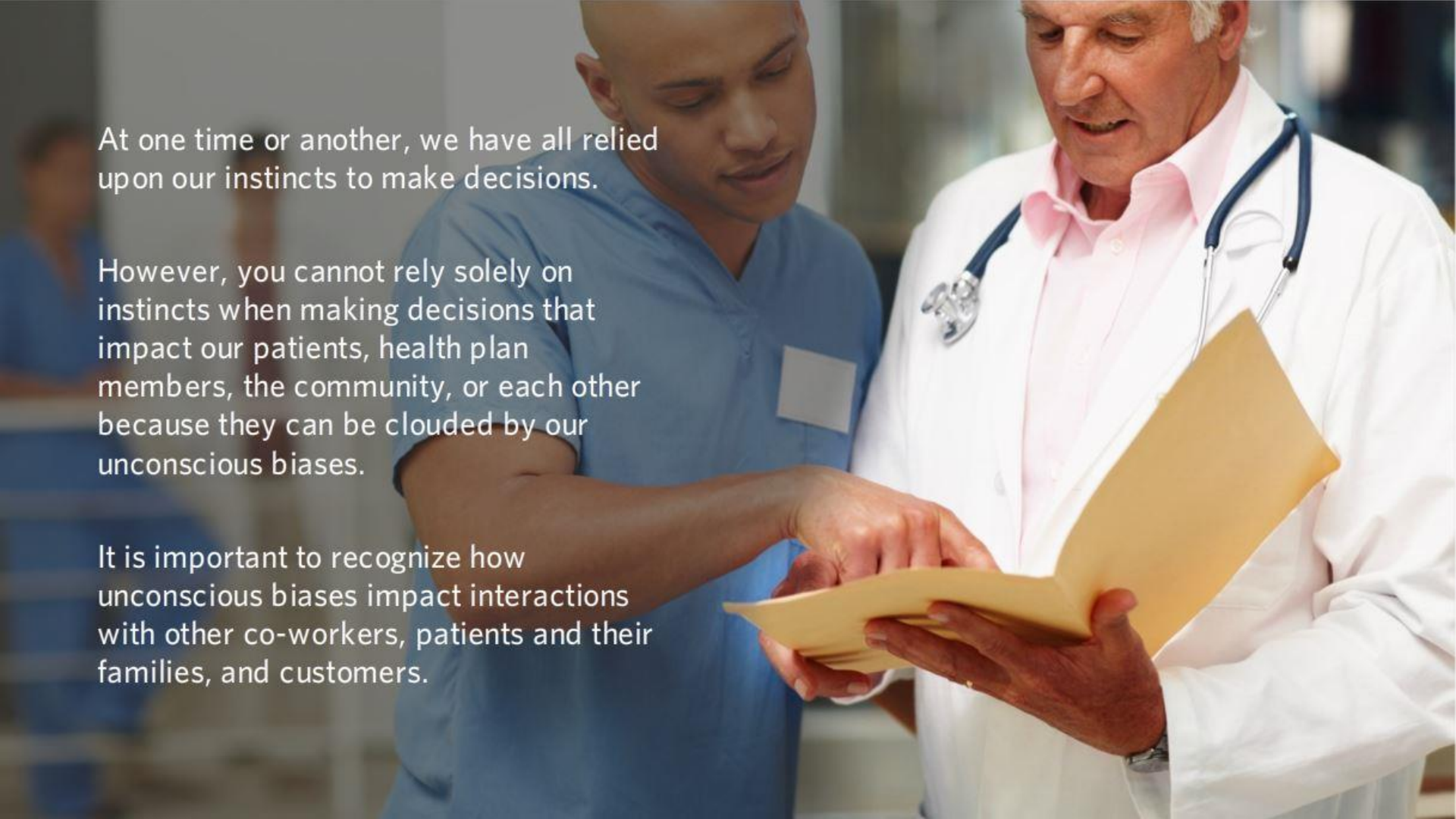




Unconscious Biases

UPMC Systemwide Annual Mandatory Training



At one time or another, we have all relied upon our instincts to make decisions.

However, you cannot rely solely on instincts when making decisions that impact our patients, health plan members, the community, or each other because they can be clouded by our unconscious biases.

It is important to recognize how unconscious biases impact interactions with other co-workers, patients and their families, and customers.

What are Unconscious Biases?

Unconscious biases are thoughts or feelings that you are not aware of that influence your judgments. These biases are rooted in your preferences for or against something.

Your preferences may lead you to having favorable or unfavorable biases.

(i.e., Everyone from my town is fantastic {favorable bias} or everyone from that generation is lazy {unfavorable bias}.)

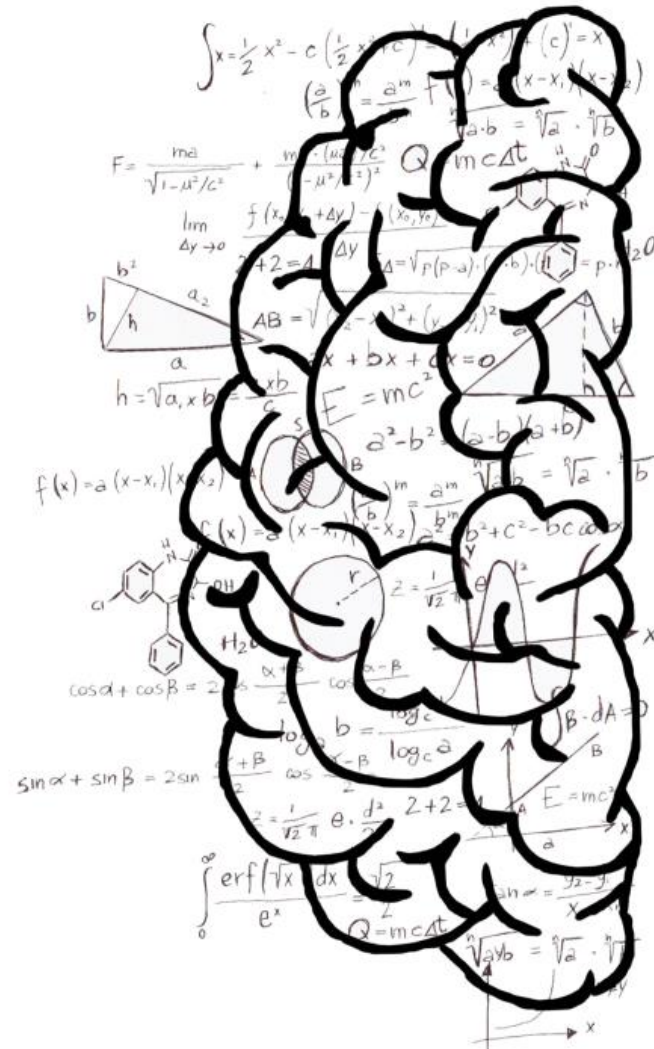


**We all have conscious
and unconscious biases.**



We All Have it - Why?

We evolved that way because unconscious biases are necessary. Organizing information into categories is a hard-wired mental shortcut which allowed our ancestors to quickly differentiate between friend and foe.





Mental shortcuts still serve an important function.

Researchers theorize that people are bombarded with 11 million pieces of information at a time, but can only consciously process 40.

When do Unconscious Biases Occur?

To understand our unconscious biases we must learn when they are most likely to occur.

Unconscious biases happen automatically and are triggered by our brain making quick judgments and opinions of people and/or situations. They occur when your preferences towards or against something impacts your actions. These behaviors happen most frequently when under pressure, multitasking, or simply being in a hurry.



Where do Unconscious Biases Come From?

Every person has unconscious biases. It's hardwired into us. Research from neurologist, Sigmund Freud, states that unconscious thoughts have the largest influence on human behavior.

We all have a background which consists of many characteristics such as age, gender, personality, and education. Our background and our life experiences shape our preferences towards or against something.



Your story creates your biases.

Your
Background + **Your**
Life Experiences = **Your**
Story

Reflect on Your Story

Think about a significant event in your life.

- How did this event shape your values or the way you view the world?
- How did it affect the way you perceive others?
- How did it affect the way you interact with others?

Your story informs your biases.



Oftentimes, your unconscious biases appear favorable towards people who have the same characteristics as you such as culture, religion, or race. Your unconscious biases usually appear unfavorable towards people who have characteristics unlike yours.

Examples of characteristics that you may unconsciously have a preference towards or against are:



Unconscious Biases

An iceberg floating in the ocean. The top part of the iceberg is visible above the water line, showing a jagged, snow-covered peak. The vast majority of the iceberg is submerged below the water surface, illustrating the concept of unconscious biases.


Think of an iceberg.

The most important part of the iceberg is the part you cannot see hidden deep under the water. Even though you cannot see the bottom of the iceberg, it is important to be aware that it exists.

Think of your unconscious biases as the bottom of the iceberg hidden below the water. We may not always know they are there, but it is important to acknowledge that they do exist.

UNCONSCIOUS BIASES

**Do you believe unconscious biases
affect us in the workplace?**



All of us bring our unconscious biases to the workplace. On any given day we can interact with many individuals that have different thoughts or feelings from our own.

It is important to recognize how unconscious biases can impact our interactions with other co-workers, patients and their families, and customers.

Biases Influence Our Behavior and Decision Making in the Workplace

At work you may have a preference towards working with individuals from your department, or someone who also attended the same school as you, or a person of the same gender. These preferences may show up unconsciously as biases towards individuals who are not from your department, did not attend the same school as you, or are of a different gender.

When your preferences impact another person or group, you are most likely demonstrating a bias.

NOTE:

You may unconsciously change your body language, tone, or other subtle cues when interacting with co-workers or customers based upon biases (favorable or unfavorable) that you have.



Unconscious biases in the workplace can affect:

- Interacting with patients and customers
- Working with coworkers
- Making decisions

Failing to recognize unconscious biases during any of these processes can hold back an employee's and/or the organization's success.



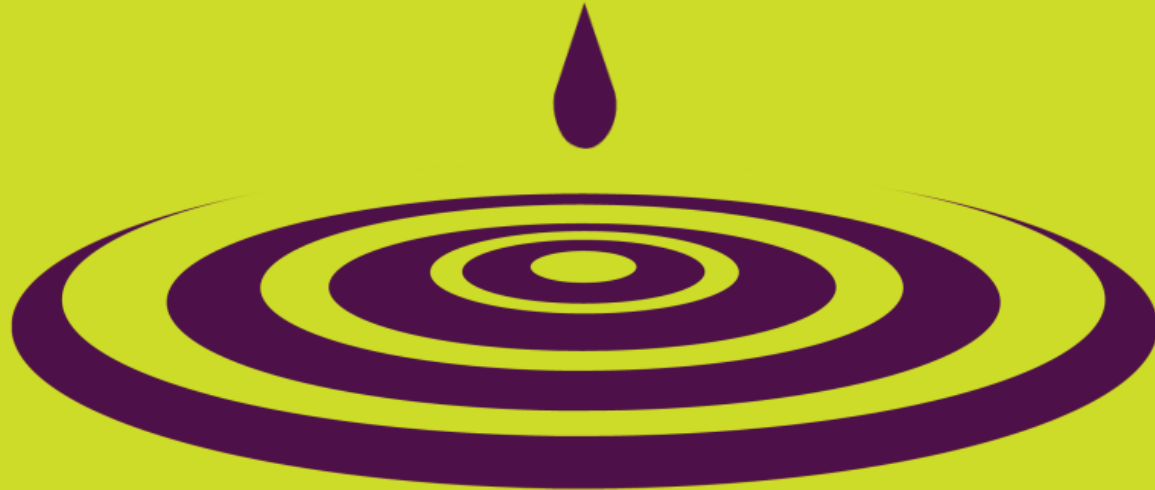
Subtle Unconscious Biases

Sometimes, unconscious bias might be obvious, but it may also be as subtle as a mentor selecting an employee that reminds them of their self as a mentee and offers them extra advice.

In this case, favorable unconscious biases would result in increased access to the mentor's time and guidance.

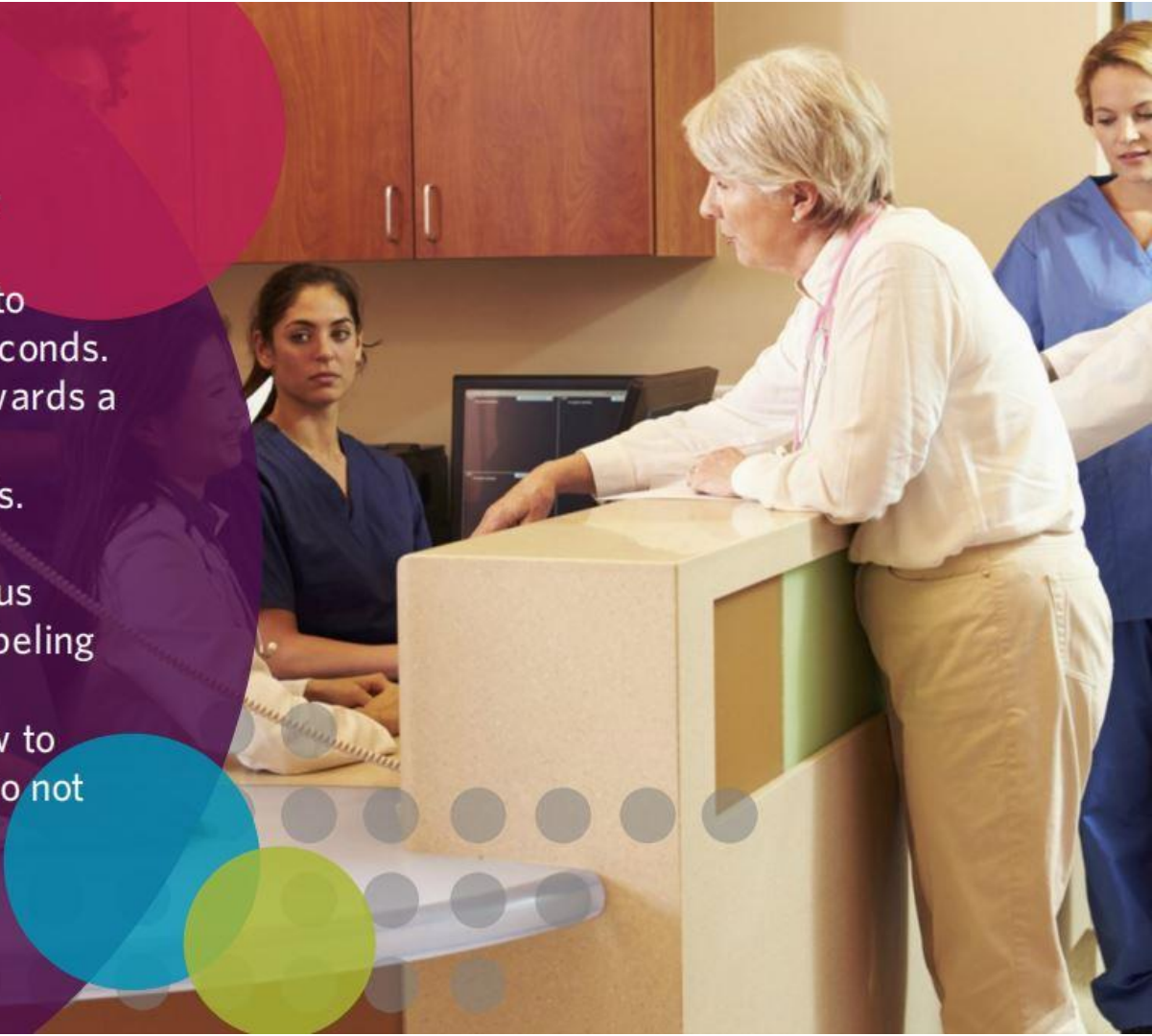
Whether unconscious bias is obvious or subtle, it can create a ripple effect. Small decisions which are influenced by unconscious biases can have a big impact.

Unconscious Biases Add Up



Naturally, we all rely at times on experiences, especially when under pressure. When interacting with a patient or customer, it is very easy to make judgements in the first few seconds. For example, a providers biases towards a population may impact their line of questions and lead to a misdiagnosis.

We all have conscious or unconscious biases, but the focus is not about labeling biases as right or wrong, it is about identifying that biases exist and how to overcome them so that our biases do not create a negative experience. Your individual behavior matters.



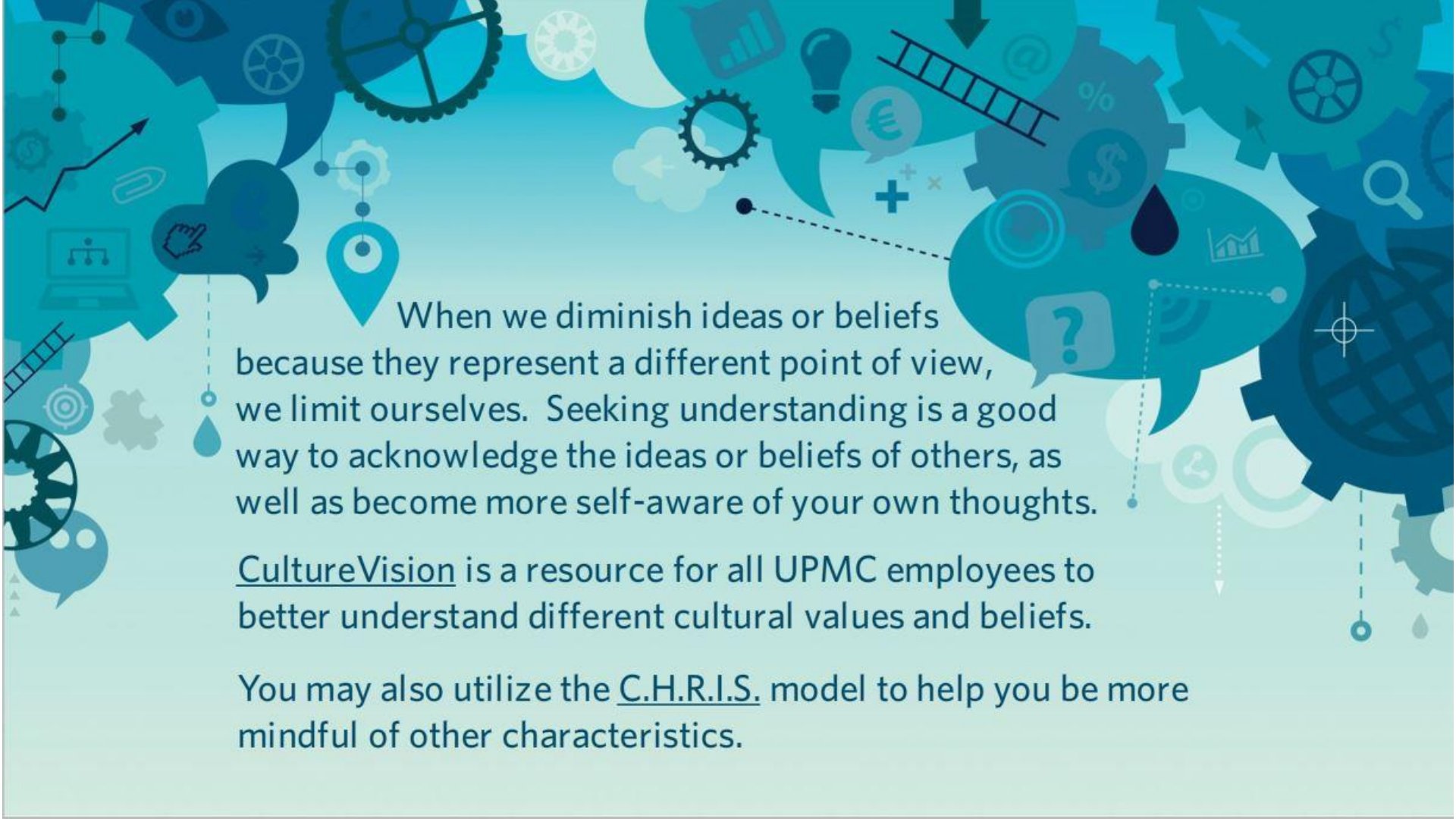


HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES

If we are not aware of our unconscious biases, especially when we are in stressful situations which might trigger them, they can affect:

- Communication with patients
- Diagnosis and treatment

Research reveals that unconscious biases can create harmful disparities in patient care. Unconscious biases can affect everything from how long providers spend explaining a procedure to a patient to how much pain medication they administer.



When we diminish ideas or beliefs because they represent a different point of view, we limit ourselves. Seeking understanding is a good way to acknowledge the ideas or beliefs of others, as well as become more self-aware of your own thoughts.

CultureVision is a resource for all UPMC employees to better understand different cultural values and beliefs.

You may also utilize the C.H.R.I.S. model to help you be more mindful of other characteristics.

Here are some questions to ask yourself, that can help increase understanding:



What am I thinking?



Why am I thinking it?



Is there a past experience that is impacting my current decision?



Is the past experience applicable now or is it based on a preference or bias?

**Behaviors that will help
you overcome your
unconscious biases**





Be Self-Aware and Aware of Others

The first step to managing your unconscious biases is to be aware. Be aware that biases exist, that we all have them, and that they are rooted in your preferences for or against something.

The background features several large, semi-transparent purple arrows pointing downwards. A vertical dashed white line is positioned in the center of the slide, passing through the text area.


Manage Your Behavior

Self-awareness is the first step. Then once you are aware of your biases; you need to manage your behavior. Managing your behavior means being mindful of how we respond to others and taking responsibility for your actions. Remember, it is all of our jobs to be champions of our core value of dignity and respect.



Build Cultural Awareness

Building Cultural Awareness is about us learning more about others. When we recognize that we all have a “story” and that we all have unconscious biases it is important to incorporate practices that treat others the way they want to be treated. Being culturally aware helps all of us treat others with dignity and respect.



More Education Regarding
these Behaviors

Interaction Tips

When interacting
with coworkers,
patients,
customers, and
community
members:



Be aware of triggers in yourself and others.



Remember that you are likely to favor people who are like you.



Do not make assumptions about individuals.



Be aware of your body language as well as your verbal language.



Base decisions on facts and information rather than “gut instinct.”

Remember, we all have unconscious biases; being self-aware of our own biases and understanding how to manage them has a huge impact when interacting with others.

The [UPMC Center for Engagement and Inclusion](#) is a resource for employees regarding unconscious biases.