

Title:**Reflective Practice to Enhance the Understanding of Being Socially Responsive Within the Healthcare Environment****Abstract:**

In the unequal society that prevails in South Africa, the healthcare environment must strive to meet the health needs of all citizens from diverse social contexts. This then requires that the curriculum of higher education programmes must prepare students to function as healthcare practitioners who have an understanding and awareness of the social environments of their patients and carers, that enter the health care system at all levels from primary health care facilities to the high technology academic hospitals. In Radiography, social consciousness can be described as the need to develop entry level diagnostic radiography practitioners who strive to transform their environments and interactions through an awareness of important social issues in the local context. An applicable pedagogy may be informed by critical consciousness which encompasses the promotion of compassionate and socially conscious healthcare professionals who advocate for change. This paper presents a focus on data from a diagnostic radiography programme and responds to the emerging question; how do radiography educators prepare their students for being critically conscious of their patients' social contexts?

A format of social inquiry was applied, using a two-stage approach: firstly, review of relevant curriculum documents; and secondly, qualitative data was gathered through a semi-structured focus group interview, followed by five (5) semi-structured individual interviews with these participants. Stimulus points identified from the curriculum documents informed the discussions during both interviews, and the focus group data further informed the individual interviews. An example of a stimulus point was when participants were asked to explain their understanding/interpretation of one of the exit level outcomes stated in a fourth-year student guide, e.g., becoming reflective practitioners and lifelong learners committed to excellence. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analysed through an interpretive approach of thematic analysis. Ethical clearance was obtained from the faculty research ethics committee at the research site. Participation was voluntary and all participants signed consent forms.

A major finding from this research was that critical reflection by both the radiography student and educator is key to developing an awareness of critical consciousness. This is in keeping with literature which proposes that critical reflection and critical action are vital elements of critical consciousness. Critical action is significant for bringing about change within these unequal social contexts of healthcare. While participants expressed that reflective practice is being undertaken, it was noted that it is performed in an unstructured manner. There was a clear indication that the current curriculum needed to be adapted to include constructive reflective practice. A recommendation was made for the current curriculum be reviewed to include active reflection. This involves the cultivation of reflection as a skill by means of frequent practice and engagement. With the aim of achieving this the participants suggested having dedicated time on the timetables to allow students and educators to engage in meaningful reflective practice.

Q1: What role can students play in building social awareness and socially responsive curricula in health professions education?

Q2: Active, constructive reflection: how could this become entrenched practice?