

# **ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS DIRECTED AT HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS: STRATEGIES TO DETERMINE IF, WHEN, AND HOW TO INTERVENE**

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Microaggressions are subtle behaviors that communicate, whether intentional or not, bias towards a person from a historically marginalized group. Microaggressions are a phenomenon that has been well-documented in the clinical literature. However, despite their prevalence and their known adverse impact on the therapeutic relationship and on provider well-being, little has been written regarding if, when, and how to intervene to address microaggressions directed from patients towards health care providers. To fill this gap, we first illustrate examples of microaggressions directed at providers, which may include cancelling a medical appointment because a patient does not want to be treated by a health care provider from a particular background or using offensive language (e.g., racial epithets).

Second, we outline considerations regarding addressing them within the clinical encounter such as determining whether a microaggression occurred, assessing the degree of emotional arousal in the clinical encounter, timing of the microaggression, the strength of the therapeutic relationship, how addressing the microaggression may or may not align with treatment targets, the intended and actual function of the microaggression, and the intended target of the microaggression (e.g., the health care provider, an individual outside of the clinical encounter). Third, we present a framework for how to intervene, which includes acknowledging the microaggression, determining the optimal point for intervening, stopping the microaggression from progressing, exploring the nature and intent of the microaggression, describing the impact of the microaggression, developing a plan for repair, securing support, and building up skills for the future. Lastly, we will present a case study wherein a provider addressed a microaggression within the context of treatment informed by the framework we present herein. This framework holds promise for equipping clinicians with the skills necessary to intervene in such interactions, which may enhance the therapeutic relationship and outcomes.

## **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the presence of microaggressions in the clinical encounter and evaluate distinct factors that can inform if, when, and how to intervene on microaggressions.
2. Apply a framework for intervening on microaggressions in the clinical encounter