

Communicating with Patients from Different Cultures

Embracing Cultural Humility

Health care delivery often involves a one-size-fits-all approach. Clinicians may treat a patient with a particular diagnosis similar to the last patient they saw with the same diagnosis because it's efficient. But shifting that mindset is one of the best opportunities you may have to help patients thrive. An individual's lived experience is rich, diverse, and complicated. And what it takes for each individual to live his or her healthiest life possible is as unique as each person is.

To achieve a deeper understanding of the patients' needs, it is essential for providers to practice "cultural humility" and acknowledge the unique elements of every individual's identity. Many of us may be familiar with cultural competency, being respectful and responsive to the health beliefs and practices and cultural and linguistic needs of diverse population groups.

But cultural humility goes even deeper. It requires us to step outside of ourselves and be open to other people's identities in a way that acknowledges their authority over their own experiences.

More trust, less stress

Good cross-cultural communication enhances your practice by:

- building your patient's confidence in the practitioner-patient relationship
- improving patient safety and clinical outcomes by minimizing misunderstandings
- making more effective use of time spent with your patient
- increasing patient satisfaction and decreasing stress for you and your patient.

Your first step toward cultural awareness and humility is simply being aware of your own cultural beliefs. For instance, think about your own views to help you identify your assumptions or attitudes that may be a barrier to good communication.

Next, learn what you can about other cultures through reading articles, attend trainings, become involved with various cultural groups or simply asking your patients.

Touchy situations

A patient's culture also influences whether he or she is comfortable being touched by a stranger, especially someone of the opposite sex. In some cultures, such as Hispanic and Arab cultures, male healthcare providers may be prohibited from touching or examining certain parts of the female body, and female healthcare providers may have similar prohibitions when caring for male patients. Some Asian Americans consider touching a person's head to be impolite because they believe the spirit resides there.

Some Jewish and Islamic women believe that modesty requires them to cover their head, arms, and legs with clothing. When you're providing care, you may have to ask the patient for special

permission to touch her head or another body part. As you would when you're caring for any patient, make sure you expose only one body part at a time.

Seeing eye to eye

When you assess a patient from a different culture, talk with him or her in a quiet setting where you won't be disturbed. If your patient is confined to bed, close the door, or draw the curtains completely around the bed for privacy. Then choose communication strategies based on your patient's cultural system of beliefs.

In many cultures, the way you communicate is as important as the words you say. For example, direct eye contact is considered impolite or aggressive in many American Indian, Indo-Chinese, and Arab cultures. Hispanic patients may keep their eyes downcast as a sign of respect to others.

How you communicate also encompasses your body language and positioning, including how much space you keep between yourself and your patient. For example, if you sit close to your patient, he or she may perceive you as warm and caring. However, depending on your patient's cultural expectations, he or she may perceive you as threatening and invading his or her personal space. In general, people from North America and Great Britain require the most personal space; those from Latin America, Japan, and the Middle East need the least and feel comfortable standing close to others.

Spanish Culture

Hispanic individuals may come from many countries with Spanish heritage, including areas of South and Central America, Spain, and several Caribbean islands.

Individuals of Spanish heritage hold a deep respect for doctors and those in authority. They also tend to avoid conflict and difficult situations and can be insistent on involving extended family in their care and decision making. Learning this information allows a provider to remain respectful when answering family members' questions after assessing the patient. Having this awareness that the patient finds it helpful to have large numbers of family members present during intimate aspects of care and discussions enables the healthcare provider to be more patient and easy-going as a provider.

Middle Eastern Descent

In the Middle Eastern culture, family members can appear protective and even demanding when trying to acquire accurate and reliable information. Depending on the severity of illness or medical information being delivered, family members of a Middle Eastern patient may be offended if not welcomed at the bedside during the medical discussion. Muslim families are very concerned with modesty and gender segregation to protect the honor of the family. Females prefer to cover their head and body parts unless they are asked to uncover for a certain procedure.

Asian Heritage

Knowing that Asian culture may prevent some individuals from freely expressing their health concerns in an effort to appear socially good and healthy, health concerns like depression may go untreated or undiagnosed for long periods of time to not bring shame to their families and neighbors. In some Asian cultures, emotions are rarely shown, and the husband or eldest son may be the undisputed decision maker.

Respect goes a long way

To build a good relationship with a patient from another culture, focus on conveying empathy and showing respect. Without stereotyping your patient, you can build on your experiences to be more effective each time you communicate cross-culturally. The more you know and the more questions you ask your patient, the more prepared you will be to best serve them.

Bringing down language barriers

If your patient speaks a different language than yours, it is essential to use a trained medical interpreter for best communication. A professional interpreter not only knows the patient's language but is also well-versed in medical terminology and has been trained to present information in an unbiased way. Regional Medical Center providers use the Health Care Interpreter Network to get an interpreter. They are available in all RMC clinics and hospital.

Community Provider Network see our website below for more details.

<https://cchealth.org/healthplan/provider-interpretation.php>

For additional articles see links below.

https://journals.lww.com/nursingmadeincrediblyeasy/Fulltext/2014/11000/Communicating_with_patients_from_different.2.aspx

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/blog/2018/06/practicing-cultural-humility-to-transform-healthcare.html>