

Cultural Competency in Healthcare

The effective integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of healthcare, thereby produce better health outcomes.

Culture

Shapes how people experience their world. It is a vital component of how services are both delivered and received. Culture includes the values, beliefs, standards, languages, thinking patterns, behavioral norms, communication styles, etc., of a group of people, institutions or organizations that guide decisions and actions and are transmitted from one generation to another.

Cultural Knowledge

Familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group.

Cultural Sensitivity

Knowing that cultural difference, as well as similarities exists, without assigning values (i.e., better or worse, right or wrong) to those cultural differences.

Cultural Awareness

Developing sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group. This process involves internal changes in terms of attitudes and values. Cultural awareness also refers to the qualities of openness and feasibility that people develop in regards to others. Cultural awareness should be supplemented with cultural knowledge.

Why is Cultural Competency in Healthcare important?

Addressing cultural competence is imperative as more and more, health & human service providers must operate in cross-cultural contexts. Therefore, proper preparation is necessary to effectively prevent, identify and treat many health problems. It begins with an awareness of your own cultural beliefs and practices, and recognition that people from other cultures may not share them. This means more than just speaking another language or recognizing the cultural icons of a people. It also means changing prejudgments or bias you may have of a person's cultural beliefs and customs. It is important to promote mutual respect. Cultural competence is rooted in respect, validation and openness towards someone with different social and cultural perceptions and expectations than your own. People tend to have an ethnocentric view in which they see their own culture as the best. Some individuals may be threatened by or defensive about cultural differences.

As stipulated in the BlueCare Tennessee and TennCareSelect Provider agreements, participating providers are required to treat BlueCare Tennessee and TennCareSelect members the same as non-BlueCare Tennessee members and agree to not discriminate in the quality of services or treatment provided. BlueCare Tennessee and TennCareSelect providers should be willing and able to treat members with all cultural backgrounds and maintain consistency in providing quality care across all cultures.

Promote Cultural Competency:

Health literacy support: communicate clearly, slow down the pace of the conversation and use simple words to explain the situation.

Be conscious of the dynamics when people from different cultures interact. Adapt service delivery to help meet the diverse needs of patients.

Incorporate cultural knowledge among your staff making it part of your practice's policies and procedures. Train bilingual and bi-cultural staff or volunteers to orient patients to the health care system, and to document complaints as floorwalkers and observers.

What is the impact to Providers?

Seeing positive outcomes in patients and efficiency in office operations.
Higher quality score potential and the potential for financial rewards from quality incentive programs.

Moving towards culturally appropriate service delivery means being:

- Knowledgeable about cultural differences and their impact on attitudes and behaviors;
- Sensitive, understanding, non-judgmental and respectful in dealings with people whose culture is different from your own;
- Flexible and skillful in responding and adapting to different cultural contexts and circumstances.



Ask the Right Questions and Look for Answers

The occurrence of acute and chronic medical conditions may vary by culture. Your observations and questions can help improve the quality of care and remove barriers in the patient's health care.

Ask Yourself: If I spoke a different language would I feel comfortable with this treatment/facility/provider?

Find ways to ask open-ended questions when possible.

Acknowledge the patient's perception of illness and self-care practices.

Help patients learn ways to communicate that will help you access their healthcare needs.

Recognize that in many cultures, family members are deeply involved in individual members' health decisions. Involve extended family members whenever possible in planning care.

Communicate clearly, slow down the pace of the conversation and use simple words to explain the situation.

Realize that patients from another culture will have different ideas about competent treatment. They may, for example, expect a prescription with each office visit. Explain to patients that the system of medicine in the U.S. relies on asking a lot of questions to help make a diagnosis.

Time of appointments may take twice as long. Talk to the patient (not the interpreter) during the appointment.

Interpreters. Don't expect to use the family as an interpreter or for translating.



To be culturally competent, a provider should acknowledge culture's profound effect on health outcomes and should be willing to learn more about this powerful interaction.

External Resources

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; A Physician's Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care

<https://cccm.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/>

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; Think Cultural Health

<https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/education>

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; Cultural and Linguistic Competency

<https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=1&lvlid=6>

Cross-Cultural Health Care

<http://diversityrx.org/>

Health Resources & Services Administration; Culture, Language and Health Literacy

<https://www.hrsa.gov/cultural-competence/index.html>

The Cross Cultural Health Care Program

<http://xculture.org/>

Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence

<https://nccc.georgetown.edu/assessments/>