

CULTURAL HUMILITY

FOSTERING RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING
YOUR PATIENT'S UNIQUE IDENTITY

What is it?

Cultural humility gives us a greater understanding of cultures that are different from our own and helps us recognize each person's unique experiences that shape who they are and how they behave in a healthcare situation. It does not require a mastery of lists of different cultures.

What Can you (or HCP's) do to Help Better Understand and Empower your Patients?

Be Open and Honest

1

Have the willingness to suspend what you “know” about a person based on generalizations about their gender, age, or culture and be open to their uniqueness by gaining a better understanding of their history, beliefs, and preferences. Be honest about your lack of knowledge about other people's culture and experiences. Ask questions about how they would like to communicate in a healthcare situation and adapt your style accordingly.

Reflect on Your Own Identity and Culture

2

Adopt a mindset of ongoing self-exploration recognizing possible biases you may have combined with a genuine interest to learn about your patients' unique experiences. Don't assume your preferences are the same as your patients. When you believe that you know their preferences, check with the patient if they are correct.

Recognize Intent versus Impact

3

Understand that good intentions toward your patients do not negate the unintentional hurtful impact they may have on your patient.

Show Humility

4

Acknowledge that we all make mistakes. Own them, learn from them, and be opened to feedback from your patients and colleagues.

Speak Up

5

Call out ageism, sexism, racism, or prejudice that you witness in your practice.

Educate Yourself

6

Approach learning about others as a lifelong goal. Participate in courses to better understand cultural humility to better serve your patients.

Why is it important?

Taking the time to understand and see the unique elements of your patient's identity versus the way you might automatically categorize them, demonstrates respect for the patient, and can help you give your patients the care they want and the care they need.

Here is an example of how making cultural assumptions and NOT taking the time to learn about an individual can create a problem:

» Dr. Johnson recently studied Mexican culture and learned that the majority of Mexicans are Catholic.

» One of her patients of Hispanic heritage is struggling with coming to terms with her cancer diagnosis, so Dr. Johnson, who is Catholic herself, requests a Catholic priest to help counsel her without consulting her patient first.

» This patient does not have religious beliefs and feels offended by Dr. Johnson's assumption.

» If Dr. Johnson had taken an approach that was rooted more in cultural humility, she would have asked her patient questions to gain a better understanding of her personal cultural history, experience, preferences, and beliefs. This would have helped Dr. Johnson identify her patient's needs during the diagnosis and make a more appropriate choice for her patient and improve their ongoing relationship.

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