

Cultural Implications

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Adaptation is the act or process of changing to better suit a situation. In the ever-changing field of medicine, the ability to change and adapt is indispensable. Healthcare professionals are expected to deliver the same standards of care to every patient they encounter, and without preconceived judgements or biases. This can be difficult when dealing with vulnerable populations such as, incarcerated individuals, the mentally ill, the unborn, and people of a lower socioeconomic status. To achieve exceptional patient-centered care, personal feelings must be set aside, and focus must be directed to the health and wellness of the client.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), cultural competence is defined as the ability to interact and deliver effective health care services that meet the social, cultural and linguistic needs of patients. Cultural competence is an essential factor in building a healthy rapport and establishing a relationship between the nurse and client. This also helps to ensure that the client is receiving the highest level of care possible. Understanding the culture of a client is important because it can affect the care that is given. For example, if a language barrier is present between the nurse and client and it does not get addressed, miscommunication and lack of pertinent information can result. The use of an interpreter and educational materials in the patient's native tongue could be implemented as a solution.

Vulnerable populations are groups of people that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than that of the general population. This includes individuals that are currently incarcerated or have been previously. Caring for these patients may be unsettling to some nurses due to their own personal beliefs and biases regarding the nature of the crime committed. If I was caring for one of these individuals, I would not want to know the reason for confinement. I

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strive to deliver the same standard of care to every patient under my supervision, but that knowledge might alter my perception of them. It would be difficult for me to perform my job duties with that weighing down my conscience. I would reflect on my own beliefs and remind myself that this client is my responsibility and deserves the same respect and care as every other patient.

A journal entry written by Kathryn Murphy DNS, APRN in *Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Journals*, entitled “The Importance of Cultural Competence,” offers helpful tactics for healthcare professionals to tackle biases, judgements or beliefs to ensure patients receive culturally competent care. The article features three key components to achieving cultural competence; knowledge, attitude and skills. Knowledge pertains to awareness, asking questions and learning from the patient. Attitude is having an open mind, using sensitivity and remaining nonjudgmental towards the client. Incorporating the learned skills and utilizing them when providing cultural competent care is the final component to the article. Integration of these helpful tactics will ensure healthcare professionals deliver the highest possible level of care to all patients, regardless of culture or ethnicity.

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References

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