



Cultural Awareness

What is culture?

“the learned, shared and transmitted values, beliefs, norms and lifeway practices of a particular group that guides thinking, decisions and actions in patterned ways.” (Leininger)

Components within Culture

Ethnic identity	Religion and spirituality
Gender	Socio-economic status
Age	Place of residency
Differing abilities	Employment
Sexual orientation	Education

There is greater intra-cultural variation than inter-cultural variation.

Significant Life Passages

Birth
Coming-of-age
Marriage
Dying
Mourning

All are strongly influenced by culture.

Health Care Issues when Cultures Collide

Individual autonomy: may not be valued strongly in family-centered cultures.

Truth: withholding a diagnosis or negative information may be seen as a way of maintaining hope.

Consent: may be seen as a family decision rather than that of the individual.



Guidelines for Assessment

1. Observe interactions between patient and family members, and among family members.
2. Listen to the patient.
3. Communication:
 - a) use of interpreters if non-English speaking
 - b) non-verbal behavior
 - c) conversation style
4. Find out about customs or taboos that might restrict care or treatment.
5. Try to determine what the patient and family expect and regard as appropriate in terms of communication.
6. Be aware that the patient and family may have a different sense of time than you do.
7. Don't assume that patients and family members want to be on a first-name basis with you.

Practicing Cultural Awareness

1. Be aware of your own ethnocentrism.
2. Assess the patient and family's beliefs about illness and treatment.
3. Ask the patient's personal preferences and do not expect an individual to represent his or her entire culture.
4. Note and affirm the use of complementary or alternative health care practices.
5. Incorporate the patient's cultural healing practices into the plan of care.
6. Be sensitive to the need for translation services.