

What is cultural competency in healthcare?



Cultural competency is “the level of knowledge-based skills required to provide effective clinical care to patients from a particular ethnic or racial group.”¹

Cultural competence is "the ability of systems to provide care to patients with diverse values, beliefs and behaviors including tailoring delivery of care to meet patients' social cultural and linguistic needs. The ultimate goal is a healthcare system and workforce that can deliver the highest quality of care to every patient, *regardless* of race, ethnicity, cultural background, or English proficiency." ²

Why do we need to address cultural competency?

Every clinical encounter is a cross-cultural one, and healthcare professionals benefit by learning to provide culturally and linguistic responsive care. This will increase patient satisfaction, improve patient compliance, and work to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities.

Cultural Competence is rapidly being recognized as a major quality issue for health care systems. The 2000 US Census confirmed that our country is becoming increasingly diverse. Racial/ethnic minorities make up 30 percent of the American population and are expected to increase to 40 percent by 2030. Some 47 million US residents speak a language other than English. ³ Clinicians are not insulated from this diversity and addressing a patient's social and cultural background will assist them in delivering culturally competent, effective healthcare.

What is the connection between healthcare disparities and cultural competency?

There is growing evidence of a health outcomes connection with cultural competency interventions such as provision of language services and there is a clear impact on patient satisfaction and compliance with treatment.

In a recent report by a Task Force member of the CDC's Task Force on Community Preventive Services, evidence demonstrated a positive health outcomes impact from Cultural Competency interventions such as the provision of interpreter services. ⁴

Do you know there are National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in healthcare?

In 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (OMH) released the CLAS standards to provide policy and practice guidelines for healthcare systems in order to improve the quality of care for culturally diverse populations.

There are a total of 14 CLAS standards divided into three categories addressing delivery of culturally competent care (1-3), language access services (4-7), organizational supports for cultural competence (8-14). CLAS standards four through seven are current Federal requirements for the recipients of Federal financial assistance (OMH 2002). You can access the standards at <http://www.omhrc.gov/CLAS/>

Sources

1. The Department of Health and Human Services & Health Resources and Services Administration
2. The Commonwealth Fund, New York, NY. 2002
3. Manhattan Cross Cultural Group
4. Quinn T., Culturally Competent Healthcare System - A systematic review. San Francisco, CA: Presentation for the American Healthcare Quality Association 2005 Annual Meeting and Technical Conference; 2005.