

The Joint Commission: Cultural Diversity

Cultural Diversity

Lesson Information

Purpose

To provide healthcare workers with information to increase their knowledge and to help them meet the requirements of The Joint Commission, Occupational Safety & Health Administration, and other regulatory bodies, with the goal of providing safe, competent, and quality patient care.

Abstract

America is a nation of immigrants. Most Americans' ancestors came from other countries with different languages, customs, and systems of belief. Showing respect for your patients' cultural, spiritual, and psychosocial values demonstrates **cultural competency**.¹ Cultural competency enables healthcare workers to understand their patient's expectations about the care, treatment, and services they receive.

This lesson briefly describes the cultural differences that you may encounter when providing care to patients.

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Define the terms related to culture.
2. Recognize cultural differences among Americans.
3. List interventions that healthcare workers can use to meet the needs of culturally diverse patients.

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Screen 1 of 21

Introduction

America is a nation of immigrants. Most Americans' ancestors came from other countries with different languages, customs, and systems of belief. Showing respect for your patients' cultural, spiritual, and psychosocial values demonstrates **cultural competency**.¹ Cultural competency enables healthcare workers to understand their patient's expectations about the care, treatment, and services they receive.

This lesson briefly describes the cultural differences that you may encounter when providing care to patients.

Screen 2 of 21

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Define the terms related to culture.
2. Recognize cultural differences among Americans.
3. List interventions that healthcare workers can use to meet the needs of culturally diverse patients.

Screen 3 of 21

What is Culture?

A person's culture describes his or her learned values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors.² Culture refers to the way a particular group of people view the world and the set of traditions that are passed on from generation to generation. Culture enforces the standards and rules established by a particular group and is based on the predominant values and beliefs. Cultural differences among ethnic groups include beliefs about:

- Family organization
- Personal space
- Communication
- Health, illness, and healthcare practices
- Religion
- Traditions

Your patients' ethnicity and culture contribute to their sense of self-identity, especially when it comes to relating to other cultures.

Screen 4 of 21

Cultural Competence

To achieve optimal patient outcomes, healthcare professionals must provide care that meets each patient's needs by incorporating aspects of the patient's culture into the plan of care.

Cultural Competence: Work Practices

Healthcare workers are responsible for developing cultural competence and practicing cultural sensitivity. Learn about the values, beliefs, and healthcare practices of the culturally diverse populations that your organization serves.

Page 1 of 5

Click the arrows to view ways to increase your cultural competence.

Incorporating Cultural Sensitivity



To incorporate cultural sensitivity into your work practices:

- Review your own belief systems.
- Consider how your own culture influences your behavior.

Page 2 of 5

Click the arrows to view ways to increase your cultural competence.

Incorporating Cultural Sensitivity



- Always view patients as individuals within a culture.
- Recognize that patients are a combination of heritage, culture, and community.
- Understand that culture influences how people behave and interact with others.

Page 3 of 5

Click the arrows to view ways to increase your cultural competence.

Incorporating Cultural Sensitivity

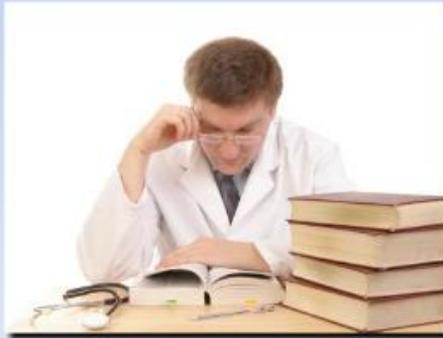


- Remember that factors such as method of communication, the use of eye contact, and the need for personal space are often culturally related. Therefore, some patients will have specific preferences related to these factors and others may not.
- Politely ask patients about practices that are unfamiliar to you.



Click the arrows to view ways to increase your cultural competence.

Incorporating Cultural Sensitivity



- Use a library or the Internet to learn about the practices, beliefs, and cultural heritage of the people who are most likely to be your patients.
- Attend staff development classes designed to promote cultural sensitivity.
- Check with your educator about targeted measures to provide care for patients of populations served by your organization.



Click the arrows to view ways to increase your cultural competence.

Incorporating Cultural Sensitivity

Focus Efforts

Hospitals should focus efforts in cultural competence with actions at admission, assessment, treatment, and discharge, or end-of-life.

<https://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/6/ARoadmapforHospitalsfinalversion727.pdf>

Screen 5 of 21

Quick Check: Cultural Competence

Please choose the correct answer for each statement. Click **Answer Key** to view the correct answers.

Yes

No

Healthcare workers must be aware of their own belief systems and biases to ensure cultural competence.

Yes

No

You can assume that most people from the same country have similar beliefs about communication, personal space, and eye contact.

ANSWER:

Yes No Healthcare workers must be aware of their own belief systems and biases to ensure cultural competence.

A component of being culturally competent includes an awareness of your belief system and the biases that you have toward others.

Yes No You can assume that most people from the same country have similar beliefs about communication, personal space, and eye contact.

Eye contact, ways of communicating, and the need for personal space are often culturally related; however, you should always view patients as unique individuals within a culture.

Screen 6 of 21

Values

Members of a particular culture generally have a value system that determines acceptable behavior. Individuals often use values to assess themselves and others. In these instances, judgment is made about the superiority of one's own set of values and how those values prevail over others.

Health beliefs and practices usually reflect the value system of individuals within a certain culture. Therefore, take measures to understand a patient's value system in order to promote proper healthcare practices and improve patient outcomes.

Screen 7 of 21

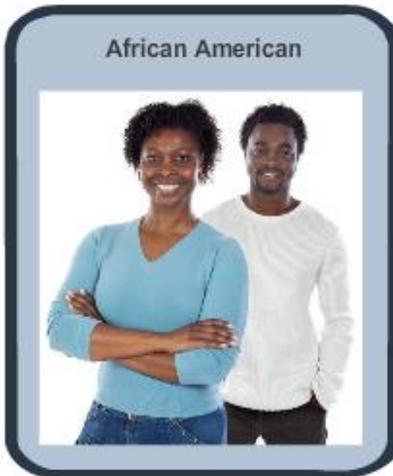
Race and Ethnicity

The terms race and ethnicity are used to describe different groups of people. Race refers to a classification of people based on distinctive physical characteristics such as skin color.³ Ethnicity refers to special groups within a race who are defined by national origin. Members of an ethnic group may have the following in common: heritage, national origin, social customs, and language.

Since communication is the foundation for safe patient care, it's important to assess the patient's preferred language to receive information. It's the patient's right to receive information in a way he or she understands. Because of these differences, healthcare workers will also need to assess the patient for their learning needs and how they learn best (verbal, demonstration, video, etc.).

Use a language interpreter and translation services to provide patient information in the patient's preferred language.⁵

Click each flashcard to view some countries of origin of different ethnic groups.



Some Countries and Areas of Origin

England, Scotland, Ireland, Poland, Scandinavia, Italy, Russia, North Africa and Europe

Some Countries and Areas of Origin

Africa, Haiti, Jamaica, Dominican Republic

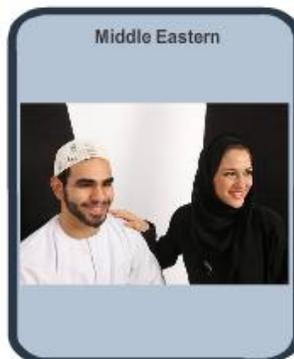
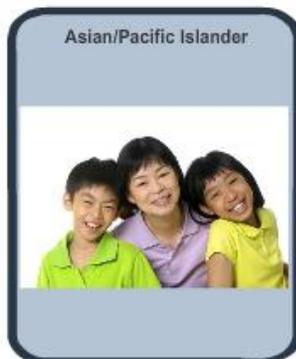
Some Countries and Areas of Origin

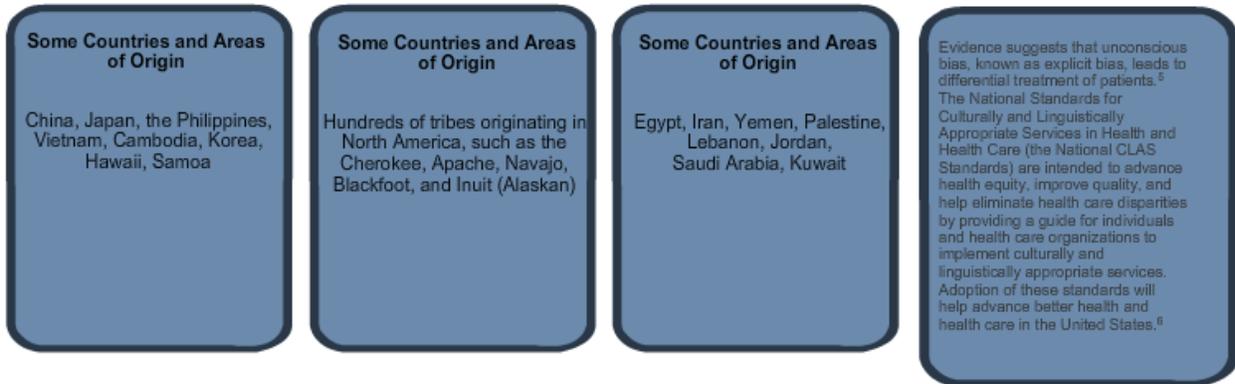
Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central America, South America, Spain

Screen 8 of 21

Race and Ethnicity

Click each flashcard to view some countries of origin of different ethnic groups.





[Click here to view the CLAS standards.](#)

Screen 9 of 21

Limited English Proficient (LEP)

CMS and TJC require healthcare workers to assess and provide language assistance services to those who need them in order to communicate effectively.

Examples are:

- Employed interpreters
- Staff members being certified in a particular language
- Special interpretive phones that connect you and the patient to an interpreter. Multiple languages available.



Did You Know?

Some of the newest research shows that patients with limited English-speaking ability are more likely to experience an adverse event and be harmed as a result. Communication error is the most commonly identified cause.⁷

Screen 10 of 21

Stereotypes

When members of different groups live and work together in a community, it is easy for those in each group to form specific beliefs about other groups. A belief about an individual based solely on his or her affiliation with a particular group is a stereotype. Healthcare workers must guard against stereotyping patients by not making assumptions based on the cultural group to which the patient belongs.

Screen 11 of 21

Quick Check: Race and Ethnicity

Select the correct answer then click **Check Answer**.

Question 1

Which of the following refers to the classification of people according to shared physical characteristics?

- Culture
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Stereotype

ANSWER:

Question 1

Which of the following refers to the classification of people according to shared physical characteristics?

- Culture
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Stereotype

 Check Answer  Reset Choices  Next Question

Question 1 of 1
Tries Remaining: 0

That's correct! Race is the classification of people according to shared physical characteristics.

Screen 12 of 20

Family Organization

Families form the basis for cultural groups, but the structure of a family varies from culture to culture. The family organization determines who makes decisions for the family and who takes responsibility for ensuring that they receive health care. In some cultures, the father or oldest male is the authority figure. In others, both the mother and father have the responsibility for decision making.

Screen 13 of 20

Beliefs

Beliefs are based on commonly held opinions, knowledge, and attitudes about the world and life. A patient's beliefs influence his or her thoughts about health and illness. Members of a culture share beliefs about:

- The nature and cause of illness
- Types of healthcare practices
- Their relationship to a higher power

Screen 14 of 20

Common Beliefs About Health and Illness

Most people tend to view the causes of health and illness in one of three ways, or in a combination of these ways.⁸

Religious or Magical Beliefs	Some people hold beliefs that illness and disease are caused by the actions of a higher power, such as God or different gods, supernatural forces, evil spirits, or ghosts. Health is a blessing or reward and illness is a punishment for breaking rules or failing to please the source of power.	Those who believe that illness and pain result from punishment for wrongdoing may complain less and be reluctant to seek medical intervention. These patients may rely on charms, chants or holy words, and rituals like therapeutic touch and prayer circles. Praying, fasting, wearing amulets, burning candles and establishing family altars may also be important to people who hold magical or religious beliefs about health and illness.
Scientific Beliefs		
Naturalistic or Holistic Beliefs		

Religious or Magical Beliefs	Patients may hold beliefs that health and illness are caused by genetics, infectious agents, or wear and tear on the body such as stress, environmental agents, or injury.	Those who see illness as the result of environmental factors, infectious agents, genetics, or injury are more likely to seek scientifically-based medical help. Individuals with scientific beliefs may practice prevention such as avoiding pathogens, chemicals, activities, or foods known to cause body system malfunction.
Scientific Beliefs		
Naturalistic or Holistic Beliefs		

Religious or Magical Beliefs	Still others may have holistic beliefs that cause them to view themselves and the environment as always exchanging energy and matter. This belief system is based on the concept of balance, such as the right amount of exercise, food, sleep, evacuation, and interpersonal relationships.	Individuals who have holistic belief about health and illness may use herbs, acupuncture, acupressure, and controlled deep-breathing exercises to achieve a feeling of inner peace. Mind-body practices such as tai chi and meditation may be used to achieve balance and wellness.
Scientific Beliefs		
Naturalistic or Holistic Beliefs		

Religious Practices

For many individuals, spirituality is expressed through religious practices. Religion is an organized system of belief in a higher power. Spirituality and religion are products of an individual's cultural background and experience. Spiritual values and religious beliefs form the rules of how a person determines right from wrong. A patient's religious beliefs provide guidelines for moral behavior.

The major religions of the United States include:

- Protestantism
- Roman Catholicism
- Judaism
- Islam
- Hinduism

If a patient requests a visit from clergy or pastoral staff, initiate the request promptly and ensure the patient's privacy when a spiritual advisor is visiting the patient. Also ensure privacy when patients are engaged in a religious act such as praying.

Religious Preferences

Religious preferences are highly personal and can vary within a given culture. For example, Hispanics are traditionally Roman Catholic. However, you may also find Hispanics attending Protestant churches within their communities.

Religious items and [rituals](#) may have significant importance to patients. For example, the crucifix, Bible, and religious medals are usually important to Roman Catholics. The prayer rug is significant to those of the Islamic religion who pray five times each day facing in the direction of their holy city, Mecca. Amulets and special charms are important to Native Americans and to some cultures in the Middle East. Talismans are engraved stones, rings, or other objects that are used to ward off evil.

Respect religious items when they are in your patient's room. Do not touch these items unless you have been given permission to do so. You can, however, ask a patient to explain what the items are and how they relate to their health beliefs. In addition, schedule tasks to avoid interrupting religious rituals or clergy visits, including times of prayer and meditation.

Supporting Patients' Spirituality

Certain foods are important in some cultures. For example, many Orthodox Jews will only eat specially prepared, or kosher food, and some Muslims will only eat halal, or permissible foods. In addition, some Roman Catholics restrict food intake on specific dates. During Ramadan, most Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Be sure to ask patients about their food preferences.

Other ways that you can support your patients' spiritual or religious practices include respecting the patient's belief system and avoiding the tendency to push your beliefs and values onto your patients. Listen attentively to patients and try to understand the relationship between their beliefs and their health practices.



Did You Know?

Cultural, religious, and spiritual considerations at the end-of-life are important. Staff should identify and respect the patient's needs.³

Screen 18 of 21

Traditions

Traditions are customs and practices followed by members of a culture and passed on from generation to generation. Traditions may be related to religious rituals or holiday celebrations. Special foods are often prepared to observe traditions at holidays. Think about the preparation of turkey for Thanksgiving, corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick's Day, challah (braided bread) on the Sabbath or for Jewish holidays, and traditional tacos, tamales, and enchiladas on Cinco de Mayo. Specific holidays for different cultures occur throughout the year.

Some traditions relate to reaching maturity and may be tied to religious beliefs too. For example, many Jewish adolescents have a bar mitzvah to celebrate their coming of age at 13. Honoring and practicing traditions gives people a sense of stability and continuity. Traditions help to bind the people of a culture closer together.

Healthcare workers have a unique opportunity to learn about other cultures directly from patients. It is important to remember, however, that even though a person is part of an identifiable culture, he or she is an individual within the culture and may not follow all customs or hold all beliefs of that culture.

Screen 19 of 21

Quick Check: Elements of Culture

Match each element that makes up a person's culture with the appropriate example. Use your mouse pointer to drag each blue box to the correct clear box then click **Check Answers** when you are done.

Element of Culture		Example
Traditions	1	A patient tells you that she would like to pray every day from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM.
Beliefs about health and illness	2	A patient requests tamales and enchiladas to celebrate Cinco de Mayo.
Spiritual or religious beliefs	3	A patient states that she doesn't feel comfortable making healthcare decisions without her husband because he is the decision maker for the family.
Family organization	4	A patient tells you that he is sick because he's being punished for his wrongdoings.

ANSWER:

Element of Culture		Example
Traditions	1	3 A patient tells you that she would like to pray every day from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM.
Beliefs about health and illness	2	1 A patient requests tamales and enchiladas to celebrate Cinco de Mayo.
Spiritual or religious beliefs	3	4 A patient states that she doesn't feel comfortable making healthcare decisions without her husband because he is the decision maker for the family.
Family organization	4	2 A patient tells you that he is sick because he's being punished for his wrongdoings.

Screen 20 of 21

At-Risk Population

The acronym LGBT(Q) stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender". Sometimes Q is also used, which stands for questioning orientation or queer. Like many other populations identified as at-risk, research has demonstrated that LGBT individuals sometimes face disparities in care because of their sexual orientation. To ensure quality care, all patients should be treated with respect and dignity. LGBT individuals should be assured access to support person of their choice.⁹

To better serve LGBT individuals who are limited English proficient, policies and procedures need to be in compliant with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Staff should be sensitive to concerns about privacy and confidentiality.

Forty-one percent of LGBT age 50 and older have a disability. Hospitals must ensure their rehabilitation policies comply with caring these LGBT individuals.¹⁰

Summary

America is a nation made up of individuals with various cultural backgrounds. Many of these individuals will need healthcare at some point in their lives. The Joint Commission requires accredited healthcare organizations to provide medical care to all individuals without compromising or dismissing their cultural background.

Culturally competent medical personnel play an essential role in providing safe, quality healthcare for everyone in our growing population. Each patient is a unique individual whose development is the result of his or her own culture, community, lifestyle, and personal experiences.

Discuss any questions that you may have about the populations you serve and cultural diversity with your educator or supervisor.

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Glossary

Rituals:

Solemn and ceremonial acts that reinforce faith.

General Instructions for Taking Tests

You have chosen to begin the test on:

The Joint Commission: Cultural Diversity

There are 10 questions in this test. Be sure you have enough time to complete all questions before you continue. If you exit the test before clicking 'Complete the Test,' your answers to the questions will not be saved. If you leave some questions blank and click, 'Complete the Test,' any unanswered questions will be scored as incorrect.

Tests may include case studies, true/false, and multiple choice questions, including single or multiple answer. Your test score is the percentage of questions answered correctly out of the total.

If you are ready to begin, click **Take Test** in the menu bar above.

You have the option to take this test later. If you would rather take this test later, click **Personal Page** in the menu bar above to return to your list of assigned lessons.

After you achieve a passing score for this test, please click **Evaluation** to complete and submit an evaluation of the activity.

Post test – Cultural Diversity

1. Culturally competent medical care means which of the following?
 - A. Care provided to a patient by a caregiver with the same cultural background
 - B. Care provided by a caregiver that includes the patient's cultural background in the plan of care
 - C. Care provided by a facility that accepts patients from specific cultures
 - D. Care provided exactly the same way for each individual patient regardless of cultural background

2. Hispanic people are an ethnic group of individuals from which areas?
 - A. Europe and Scandinavia
 - B. North America's native tribes
 - C. Africa or Haiti
 - D. Spanish-speaking countries

3. Which of the following is an appropriate action when a patient in isolation requests a visit from a clergy member?
 - A. Explain to the patient that visitation with those in isolation is limited to immediate family members.
 - B. Instruct the visiting clergy about isolation precautions and provide privacy during the visit.
 - C. Advise the patient to confer with the clergy member over the telephone.
 - D. Offer to deliver a message to the clergy member on the patient's behalf.

4. A patient has a prayer rug and prays five times a day. The patient most likely practices which religion?
 - A. Roman Catholicism
 - B. Islam
 - C. Hinduism
 - D. Protestantism

5. What term is used to describe generalizations based on a group or an individual's characteristics?
 - A. Traditions
 - B. Ethnicity
 - C. Stereotypes
 - D. Customs

6. What actions should you take when providing education to a patient who speaks very little English?
- A. Raise your voice.
 - B. Use slang.
 - C. Use an interpreter.
 - D. Avoid eye contact.
7. A patient's belief system usually affects his or her perspective of health and illness.
- A. True
 - B. False
8. Which of the following is a suggested guideline for developing cultural sensitivity?
- A. Make sure to maintain eye contact when communicating with any patient.
 - B. Discourage religious rituals that are unfamiliar to you, the caregiver.
 - C. Assign patients to a caregiver with a similar cultural background.
 - D. Respect a patient's beliefs and values, and recognize that they develop through a combination of heritage, culture, and community.
9. When caring for a patient of Roman Catholic faith, which of the following items might you see in the room?
- A. A prayer rug
 - B. The Koran
 - C. A crucifix
 - D. The Talmud
10. Which of the following terms refer to the way a particular group views the world and the set of traditions the group passes from generation to generation?
- A. Rituals
 - B. Culture
 - C. Beliefs
 - D. Stereotypes