



# Cultural Diversity Issues in Healthcare

Be remarkable

Cultural Linguistic Services, Human Resources, 120 USB, <http://www.uiowa.edu/hr/administration/linguistics>

Please contact Jane Gressang, [jane-gressang@uiowa.edu](mailto:jane-gressang@uiowa.edu), 319-335-5822 for more information.

## Seven Lessons to Learn about Cross-Cultural Communication

(adapted from Craig Storti, Cross-Cultural Dialogues, Intercultural Press, 1994 by UI International Programs)

1. Don't assume sameness.
2. What you think of as normal behavior may only be cultural.
3. Familiar behaviors may have different meanings.
4. Don't assume that what you meant is what was understood.
5. Don't assume that what you understood is what was meant.
6. You don't have to like or accept "different" behavior, but you should try to understand where it comes from.
7. Most people do behave rationally; you just have to discover the rationale.



## Communicating Effectively with English Language Learners

- Avoid using jargon, slang, idiomatic expressions, contractions, and colloquialisms unless you are certain their meanings will be understood. Avoid using long sentences, double negatives, and negative wording. Simple grammar is easier for us all.
- People's intelligence is often unjustly judged based on their language ability. Very intelligent people may have trouble acquiring a new language as an adult, but their lack of ability to communicate may not mean they cannot understand.
- If someone seems to be having trouble understanding you, enunciate more clearly, speak more slowly, or try to use a standard accent. Invite feedback on the clarity of your speech. Spell especially problematic words.
- Do not expect "yes" to always mean yes. Do not expect to hear "no" as the only way to say *no*. Some cultures prefer implying meanings because saying things directly can damage relationships. When you have doubts about what was communicated, rephrase what you think was said, and ask if that is correct.



## How can you evaluate your own attitude towards diversity?

### 1. Ask yourself these questions about your feelings towards other cultures:

(from the Queensland, Australia government's Checklist for Cultural Assessment, <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/checklists/staff.asp>)

- Do you react adversely to patients' accents?
- Are you open to differences between cultures, and different ways of doing things?
- Do you respect diverse practices and requests without judgment?
- Do you recognize that patients require equality of care irrespective of their cultural or linguistic background?
- Do you recognize and actively accommodate patients' choices about their care?
- Do you assume you know what a patient wants or needs?
- Do you identify the need for resources to overcome barriers such as poor or insufficient English proficiency or lack of support networks?
- Do you identify the need for, and obtain knowledge of, sources of extra social support, for example community organizations?

### 2. Take the online Cross-Cultural Quiz from the Provider's Guide to Quality and Culture:

- See this page: <http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=1.0.htm&module=provider&language=English>
- Sample question:

Which of the following is good advice for a provider attempting to use and interpret non-verbal communication?

- a. The provider should recognize that a smile may express unhappiness or dissatisfaction in some cultures.
- b. To express sympathy, a health care provider can lightly touch a patient's arm or pat a patient on the back.
- c. If a patient will not make eye contact with a health care provider, it is likely that the patient is hiding the truth.
- d. When there is a language barrier, the provider can use hand gestures to bridge the gap.

### 3. Seek training through UI Learning and Development:

- Try courses from the "Building Our Global Community" series. For more information, see the Office of International Students and Scholars website: [http://intl-programs.uiowa.edu/oiss/oissprograms\\_certificate.htm](http://intl-programs.uiowa.edu/oiss/oissprograms_certificate.htm)
- Look at Skillssoft Online courses such as "The Impact of Culture on Communication," "Improving Your Cross-cultural Communications," "Building Effective Intercultural Relationships," or the "International Communications Simulation." You can access these free courses by logging in at <http://skillssoft.uiowa.edu>





# Cultural Diversity Issues in Healthcare

Be remarkable

Cultural Linguistic Services, Human Resources, 120 USB, <http://www.uiowa.edu/hr/administration/linguistics>  
Please contact Jane Gressang, [jane-gressang@uiowa.edu](mailto:jane-gressang@uiowa.edu), 319-335-5822 for more information.

## Web Resources for Cross-cultural Healthcare Information

The cultural information presented in the resources below can be very helpful. It is important to note, though, that these are often *generalizations* about different cultures. These guidelines may be accurate about the typical behavior of a culture as a whole, but one country contains many cultures, and individuals choose to follow or NOT follow certain cultural norms based on their personalities. Also, culture is always changing, and people adapt to different cultures surrounding them to differing degrees. Moreover, sometimes generalizations may only refer to the most privileged group. For all these reasons,

REMEMBER TO FOCUS ON THE PATIENT AS AN INDIVIDUAL!

- The Cross-Cultural Healthcare Program

<http://www.xculture.org/>

Provides profiles of the following ethnic communities' beliefs about healing and medical care: Arab, Cambodian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Lao, Mien, Oromo, Samoan, Somali, South Asian, Soviet Jewish, and Ukrainian. These profiles also offer recommendations for overcoming potential obstacles to effective healthcare. The site also has a list of recommended books, and links to other organizations that talk about healthcare and culture.

- EthnoMed

<http://ethnomed.org/>

"The EthnoMed site contains information about cultural beliefs, medical issues and other related issues pertinent to the health care of recent immigrants to Seattle or the US, many of whom are refugees fleeing war-torn parts of the world." This site has information on these communities: Amharic, Cambodian, Chinese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Hispanic, Oromo, Somali, Tigrean, and Vietnamese. You can also download nurse-to-patient communication pages. These pages have questions nurses commonly ask in both English and the other language, allowing some communication without an interpreter (if patients can read their native language). These pages are available in: Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Greek, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Oromo, Polish, Russian, Somali, Tagalog, and Tigrinya.

- The Provider's Guide to Quality and Culture

<http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=1.0.htm&module=provider&language=English>

"Among other information, this site profiles African Americans, Arab Americans, Asian Americans, Central Asians, Hispanics/Latinos, Muslims, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and South Asians. To reach the profiles, select "Cultural Groups" from the left menu, scroll down, and select "An Expanded Look at Some Cultural Groups". Though some of those group titles suggest overgeneralization, the entries are quite long and do emphasize and address some of the diversity within those meta-groups. And "Central Asians", which includes people from Afghanistan, Armenia, Iran and other countries, is a rarely addressed and particularly timely subject."

- Resource Guide to Cultural Diversity in Health and Illness (College of the Sequoia's Library)

<http://www.cos.edu/Library/CulturalDiversity.htm>

An excellent resource list!!! This site offers an extensive list of books and websites. All the links are provided with a description of exactly what information the site or book includes.



# Cultural Diversity Issues in Healthcare

Be remarkable

Cultural Linguistic Services, Human Resources, 120 USB, <http://www.uiowa.edu/hr/administration/linguistics>  
Please contact Jane Gressang, [jane-gressang@uiowa.edu](mailto:jane-gressang@uiowa.edu), 319-335-5822 for more information.

## More Web Resources for Cross-cultural Healthcare Information

- Cultural Diversity in Health

<http://www.diversityinhealth.com/>

“The aim of this website is to provide health practitioners (particularly junior doctors working within the NSW hospital system) with information that will assist them in meeting the health needs of Australia's diverse community.” Over 40 Community Profiles provide a range of information on specific cultures. These will include details on communication styles, traditional health practices, approach to and expectations of the health system and social customs. There is also information on some of the other issues that shape identity (Religion, Gender, Age and Torture and Trauma), and a set of links to other information and general guidelines for handling cultural diversity in healthcare.

- The Multi-Cultural Health Page (Queensland, Australia government)

<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/default.asp>

This site contains guides of questions healthcare providers can use to try to better understand patients from other cultural backgrounds, as well as links to other helpful resources. They also include profiles about the healthcare beliefs of the following groups: Bosnian Muslims, Cambodians, Chinese, Croatians, Greeks, Hmong, Italians, Latin Americans, Muslims from West Asia, Philippines, Samoans and Tongans, Serbians, Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, and Vietnamese. They also have a guide specifically about working with Muslim patients, and links to many multilingual resources.

- Multi-Cultural Palliative Care Guidelines (Palliative Care Council of South Australia, Inc.)

<http://www.pallcare.asn.au/mc/mccontents.html>

This group provides information on caring for dying patients in regards to general beliefs on family involvement, words to avoid when discussing death, burial customs, religion, attitudes towards pain relief, and more. The groups they provide information about are: Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, Croatian, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Maltese, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish, and Vietnamese.

- The Rehabilitation Provider's Guide to Cultures of the Foreign-Born (Center for International Rehabilitation Research Information and Exchange)

<http://cirrie.buffalo.edu/mseries>

“Extensive profiles about helping rehabilitation patients from China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, India, Jamaica, Korea, Mexico, Philippines, Vietnam, and Haiti, plus a monograph on culture brokering. Each has a different author and the format varies somewhat. A typical monograph here might feature background information on the country of origin, immigration history, typical rehabilitation care in that country, family structure, religion, gender issues in service provision, food preferences and restriction, recommendations for service provision, and a reference list. These profiles' appeal is not limited to rehabilitation.”

