



Pocket Guide of Culturally Competent Communication

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Fundamental Principles:

- Cross-cultural medical encounters are increasing in multi-ethnic societies.
- Cultural factors influence cancer survival rates and patient/family quality of life.
- Cultural competence is a set of attitudes, skills and knowledge that can be acquired.
- Respecting cultural diversity is key to delivering comprehensive cancer care across the illness trajectory.
- Cultural competence promotes patient-centered care through sensitive negotiation of therapeutic goals.

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The following vary across cultures:

- role of autonomy in decision making,
- support available to help patients cope,
- role expectations of sick persons,
- beliefs about cancer causation,
- EOL preferences (AD, DNR, hospice),
- patient/clinician/institution relationships.

Why Cultural Competence Can Help You Plan the Patient's Care

- Discussion of cancer is a taboo in some cultures where the word "cancer" is still associated with death or guilt & shame.
- Patients from diverse cultures rely on different healing practices that can often be incorporated into care plans.
- Ethnic/genetic/cultural differences can affect treatment response directly or through lifestyles.

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Where You Need Cultural Competence Most

- Truth-telling about diagnosis, prognosis and risks
- Discussion of death and EOL choices
- Issues related to:
 - family involvement in information and decision making
 - use of alternative and complementary cancer treatments
 - reliance on spirituality and religion for healing
 - attitudes toward psychological and behavioral counseling
 - concerns regarding clinical trials

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7 Areas to Cover in Taking a Cultural History -“BALANCE”

- B** Beliefs & Values (that influence perceptions of illness)
- A** Ambience (living situation and family structure)
- L** Language & Health Literacy (role of interpreters, accuracy of translation, metaphoric meanings)
- A** Affiliations (community ties, religious & spiritual beliefs)
- N** Network (social support system)
- C** Challenges (cancer-related risks of home, work & life conditions)
- E** Economics (socioeconomic status & community resources)

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Pearls of Wisdom

- Sensitivity to cultural issues enhances trust between patients and doctors.
- Initial time investment avoids later misunderstandings and/or bedside ethical conflicts.
- Personalized cancer care incorporates patients’ and families’ culture and draws on community resources.
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- Learn about the cultural groups most frequently treated at your institution.
- Incorporate cultural into social history.
- Be prepared to briefly describe your own cultural background.

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Pearls of Wisdom (cont’d.)

- Always clarify your institutional and ethical norms in matters of truth-telling and decision making.
- Recognize your own biases toward some cultural attitudes and practices.
- Be aware how different families involve themselves in decision making.
- Be sensitive to different cultural meanings of suffering and caregiving.
- Open your mind to different ways to promote health and cope with illness.

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Resources

Cancer, Culture, and Health Disparities: Time to Chart a New Course?
Marjorie Kagawa-Singer, Annalyn Valdez Dadia, Mimi C.Yu & Antonella Surbone, CA Cancer J Clin 2010; 60: 12-39

For more information visit:
www.mdanderson.org/icare

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