Culture - the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

As the above definition indicates, culture is so much more than a person’s birthplace, skin color, or language. So it’s vital for us as providers to understand that a patient’s culture will affect their view of health and need for care. This newsletter is intended to be a “Spotlight” on various cultures with the goal of opening our world to different points of view and value/belief systems. Studies have shown that patient care that incorporates cultural values and practices results in greater patient satisfaction with care and compliance to treatment plans. Cultural Spotlight has also highlighted many of the initiatives currently underway at MUSC Health to educate our team members in culture and diversity which can help us to be more culturally sensitive. Cultural sensitivity is defined in the broadest sense to be an awareness and utilization of knowledge related to ethnicity, culture, gender, or sexual orientation in explaining and understanding situations and responses of individuals in their environment. Being sensitive helps us to assess each patient individually and prevents us from making culturally-based assumptions about their beliefs and health practices.

One important area of cultural sensitivity is communication behaviors. Before discussion of personal information, it is important to understand cultural practices related to nonverbal communication during conversation, communication practices related to the opposite gender, and cultural practices of social conversation. In some cultures, individuals maintain eye contact while listening, while in other cultures individuals avoid eye contact. Misinterpretation of these behaviors can lead to miscommunication. Some cultures have gender taboos regarding “private” issues and with whom it is appropriate to speak. There are cultural variances in the tolerance of interruptions and in the preference for social conversation before discussing personal information. Knowledge of culturally-determined communication behaviors can avoid misunderstandings.

A second area of cultural sensitivity is related to use of an interpreter. For example, in some cultures it is inappropriate to discuss personal, health-related information with someone younger or of the opposite gender. This, along with relevant laws and MUSC Health policies, certainly has implications for not using young children as interpreters for their parents. Utilizing a professional interpreter will promote a more accurate sharing of information and more open communication. MUSC Health provides interpretation services for all patients. We have 24/7 on-site Spanish interpreters. We also provide sign language interpretation through on-site or video remote interpreters. Interpreters of other spoken languages are available telephonically.

A final area of sensitivity is connected to people’s view of illness. This will affect how and when health care is sought. Often individuals will follow traditional health practices before seeking the medical professional, as a last resort. An understanding of cultural influences on health care practices enables providers to effectively individualize the teaching plan. Presenting the information in the learner’s cultural context, and including certain folk practices, if not detrimental, will strengthen the plan of care for the patient.

Our team efforts to show cultural understanding and sensitivity to our patients and their families will lead to better patient satisfaction and health outcomes.
Q&A CORNER

Over the coming months, we will feature a Q&A section. The first person to respond with the correct answer to all questions will be recognized in a future edition of the newsletter. Email answers to interpreterservices@musc.edu Subject: Cultural Spotlight - Q&A

1. The word "culture" refers only to a person’s language and nationality. (a) True   (b) False

MEET THE MEDICAL INTERPRETATION TEAM

Introducing Geraldine Acevedo Torres

Name one interesting thing about you? I have worked with children for over 20 years teaching cooking, decorating, and art. My grandchildren are my best students.

How many years have you been an interpreter at MUSC Health? I have been at MUSC Health for 12 years. I started in the Pediatric ED in 2005 as a PCT. In 2007, I moved to the Interpretation Services Department.

What do you like most about interpreting? I enjoy helping people. The linguistic challenge of thinking and speaking in two languages is like a dance. You must match the rhythm and motion of those involved.

Case Study: Consistent Use of an Interpreter

The Issue—A male patient, who spoke only Spanish entered the emergency department complaining of vomiting, abdominal pain and shortness of breath. He was admitted to an inpatient unit. His care plan was discussed with him in English. During his 2-day hospitalization, he had blood drawn, underwent an abdominal CT scan, received IV fluids and had a urinary catheter inserted. Based on his chart, a medical interpreter was never called throughout the duration of the patient’s hospitalization.

The Solution—The patient should immediately have been identified as limited English proficient (LEP) at the time of admission in the emergency room. An interpreter, whether in-person or via telephone, should have been requested. Onsite interpretation for patients who speak Spanish and telephonic interpretation, for over 200 languages, are both available 24/7/365 at MUSC Health. Any time examinations, consents, procedures and patient rounds are performed for LEP patients, interpretation services should be utilized to ensure full understanding.

Physicians and Advanced Practice Providers, who have had their language skills assessed, will wear a badge that reads "I Speak..." Bilingual care team members who would like to communicate directly with patients without the use of an interpreter could request to have their language skills evaluated. For more information, contact Antwan Walters, Coordinator, Interpretation Services at interpreterservices@musc.edu

Dawn Horne, Manager, MUSC Health, N. Charleston

May/June 2017 Q&A Corner

Editor: Stephen "Lee" Morris  Authors: Geraldine Torres & Stephen Morris

Next Issue: September/October 2017