Respect Through Understanding

Culture Awareness and Cultural Competence at UWMC
What is Cultural Competence?

“To be culturally competent doesn’t mean you are an authority in the values and beliefs of every culture. What it means is that you hold a deep respect for cultural differences and are eager to learn, and are willing to accept, that there are many ways of viewing the world.”
What is Cultural Competence?

Like an iceberg, each patient, family member, and co-worker is unique. There is more to each of us than what we see on the surface. There are some aspects of diversity that you can see – the characteristics above the water line – such as:

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Age
- Basic Appearance
- Disability – that can been seen
What is Cultural Competence?

There are many other aspects of diversity that are under the surface such as:
- Sexual Orientation
- Social status within a community
- Economic status
- Beliefs/Values/Religion
- Nation of origin
- Linguistic ability/Literacy
- Disability – that cannot be seen
At UWMC, we strive to show respect through understanding other’s cultural values and personal preferences.

The keys to showing this respect are to be aware of:

- What makes us unique.
- Our cultural viewpoints.
- The viewpoints of others.

Our staff, patients, and families are from many different cultural backgrounds and speak a wide range of non-English languages.

- The top five languages spoken by our staff, patients and families are Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Mandarin.
Why Do I Need to Learn About Cultural Diversity?

A nurse at another hospital had a similar question.

**Question:**
“I’m perplexed by all the emphasis on cultural diversity training at my hospital. If we’re ethically obligated to treat patients and co-workers with universal respect, why all the fuss?”

**Answer:**
“However imperfect, educational sessions can open your eyes to cultural issues, conflicts, and misunderstandings that you may have never considered before. I encourage you to welcome diversity education as a genuine opportunity to learn, grow, and change.”
Why Do I Need to Learn About Cultural Diversity?

Learning about cultural diversity allows us to learn, grow, and change.

- Caring for patients and working with people from many cultures and backgrounds benefits everyone.
- Raising our awareness of other cultural preferences and comparing them to our own allows us to show respect and understanding.

What is Culture?

Culture is defined as a system of shared values, beliefs, and rituals that are learned and passed on through generations of families and social groups. One’s own culture is often taken for granted, not examined, and accepted as the norm.
Filters and Self Awareness

Cultural competence teaches us that there are many ways of viewing the world. Learning the cultural values and preferences of others helps us to become less ethnocentric. In other words, it is important to realize that your own ethnic group is no better than any other ethnic group.

What is a filter?

A cultural filter is not something you can see or touch. This word describes all the factors that affect how you perceive the world around you and how you react to the actions of others.
What factors can affect your filter?

- Ethnic background
- Family background
- Religious beliefs
- Income level
- Personal experiences
- Values and choices
- Physical appearance and health

In the same way, these factors affect the filters of others.
Self Awareness

• Often, we are not aware of all the factors that make up our filter. We may think that our point of view is the right way to see a situation. We may become confused or frustrated when others do not think or respond as we expect.

• Self awareness means paying attention to our views about the behavior of others.
Awareness of Others

• As we think about our filter, we start to see that others have filters, too. Their culture, background, beliefs, and experiences impact their view of the world. Filters may be similar to our own or they may be very different.

• Cultural competence means paying attention to all factors that may influence the behavior of another person.

• The knowledge gained through awareness can improve your relationships.
Awareness of Others

One way to increase this awareness is to ask respectful and timely questions about another person’s preferences.

- Rather than asking, “Omar, what are you are eating for lunch? Why does it smell really weird?”
- Instead ask, “Omar, your lunch today doesn't look like anything I've even eaten. How do you make it?”
Farha is a Muslim woman working at UWMC. Farha attends a staff meeting every Wednesday afternoon. Fahra’s co-workers have been talking about her lateness and find it disrespectful to the department. Lorie, Farha’s co-worker, finally comments, “Farha, you’ve been late to 3 of our last staff meetings and you are missing important information.” Farha says the meeting time conflicts with her daily prayer schedule and asks her supervisor if the staff meeting could begin 30 minutes later to accommodate her daily prayers.
Asking Preferences

Many of us are aware of the saying: “treat others as you want to be treated.”

Cultural competence, requires us to dig deeper and instead: “treat others as they want to be treated.”

This means asking about preferences before acting, instead of assuming the best way to care for someone.
Asking Preferences

Every person has preferences. Not all people within a particular culture feel, think, or act the same. So the examples below don’t pertain to every person in that culture. Ask others with respect about what they prefer.

For example:

- “I want to make sure you fully understand your care plan. Would you like me to call an interpreter?”
- “I notice you wear a hijab. Do you have any food restrictions that you would like to share with me?”
It is also important to **support the role of the patient’s family**. In patient care, family structure can vary from one culture to the next.

One example is a family not wanting a patient to be told of a bad diagnosis or prognosis. The patient may request the information be shared with the family first to protect the patient from losing hope, and possibly making their condition worse.

- This can be seen in cultures in the Arab world (Middle East and North Africa), South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Afghanistan), Eritrea, and Russia.
Asking Preferences

- How one culture defines family can be very different from another culture.
- Some cultures like Native American, Native Alaskan, Mexican American, and Filipino often have many family members, extended family, community representatives, and friends visit a patient in the hospital because the definition of family is more broad in these cultures.
- Asking preferences also helps us avoid cultural miscommunication.
- Ask questions at the right time with respect. This can help ease tension that might arise due to a misunderstanding based on culture.
Samir is a Patient Services Specialist at the Digestive Disease Center. Jesse is a patient at the clinic and is 20 minutes late for his appointment. Samir asks Jesse if he had a problem that prevented him from getting to the clinic on time, Jesse says “no.” Samir is frustrated and tries to reschedule Jesse for another appointment. Samir is annoyed by Jesse’s lack of respect for the schedule. Jesse is offended by Samir’s questions and rudeness. He leaves the clinic feeling he is no longer welcome as a patient.
Putting It to Practice

• In some cultures, time is seen as being a limited resource, like water or electricity.
• In other cultures time is seen as more plentiful.
• This may cause one to think that there is no problem with having a rolling schedule and that appointment times may be flexible.
• Instead of becoming frustrated, explain to each patient why being on time for the appointment is important.
Joe and Hong work in the same department. Joe celebrates birthdays with singing, cake, and gifts. When Joe finds out that Hong’s birthday is next week, he assumes Hong will be happy with a big office party. A co-worker reminds Joe that Hong didn’t attend the last office birthday party, choosing to stay in his office and work. Joe ignores the comment and continues to plan the party. Hong hears about Joe’s plans for a party and decides to call in sick. Hong’s religious beliefs do not include recognition of birthdays and Hong doesn’t like attention. Joe is upset. He feels Hong didn’t appreciate the effort to organize the party. Their relationship is now strained.
Being Aware of Body Language

- As we provide health care, and interact with co-workers, patients, and families, we observe the behavior of others and find meaning in those behaviors.
- We may misunderstand the intent of others if our background has taught us different meanings for their actions.
- Cultural sensitivity is a matter of noticing behavior and respectfully asking the person what the behavior means.
- See the examples on the next slide to help you be more aware how body language and expression can cause miscommunication between people of different cultures.
A Hispanic couple has just lost their baby. As the mother lies in bed, the husband turns away and goes over to the window. He is overwhelmed with grief. The female nurse holds the mother’s hand for a moment and squeezes it. She then goes over to the father and touches his shoulder and speaks to him. He freezes up and turns away and his wife looks worried.
Try Instead:

Grief is an intensely private emotion. People grieve in their own way. When appropriate, ask what comfort measures would be welcome: tea, food, privacy, warm blankets, etc. Stick with means of support that have been accepted in past interactions with each person. Focus on what the family feels they need.
Strengthening Cultural Understanding

For more information about resources to strengthen cultural understanding, please visit the Web site below.