



12-2016

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# **Cultural Sensitivity in Healthcare: The New Modern Day Medicine**

By

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A culminating senior thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and  
Cultural Studies.

San Rafael, Ca.

May 2017.

## **Abstract**

In healthcare facilities there are many factors that contribute to overall equity, efficiency, and quality of care which if addressed properly can promote justice for all. Patients relying on healthcare facilities come from a variety of races, ethnicities, and cultures as are the employees who provide care for the patients. Diversity is very widespread within the healthcare environment and tolerance as well as acceptance of others is necessary in conducting smooth and efficient care. However, cultural sensitivity and competency seems to continue to be an issue that has been neglected and has severely negatively impacted healthcare centers and its surrounding communities. This paper is an investigation of cultural sensitivity, its impact, and application to help cease current social constructs impeding care within healthcare facilities. I will be analyzing previous scholarly literature on the subject with intention of orchestrating possible remedies or solutions to this continual widespread issue that has only recently been receiving awareness. My goal is to raise more awareness and provide possible solutions such as, more education and training to those in the professional healthcare field to help close the cultural gap and dilemma present in today's society.

## Introduction

The lack of cultural sensitivity exhibited throughout the United States has led to many social issues throughout society. This type of intolerance is portrayed throughout many different facets in the community creating great inequalities. Insensitivity and intolerance has aided many underlying detrimental circumstances, especially questionable outcomes or care options in healthcare. The rise of racism, prejudices, and discrimination are thought processes in which tolerance to differences are excluded. Intolerance is inhumane, and if this system of thinking continues throughout all institutions, the public, and generations to come will be at a great loss. Cultural sensitivity ought to be an integral part of healthcare practitioner training to provide equitable, efficient, and quality care despite the distractions manifested by social constructs, social norms, and other forms of oppression.

The paper's intention is to draw awareness about the major issue of intolerance, lack of understanding, and necessity of inclusion that is beneficial in healthcare institutions. The view of cultural sensitivity can be used as a building block, and starting point to construct new healthy perspectives. Initial discussion will be in regards to explaining concepts and terms that reveal how cultural sensitivity or competency can assist or progress care practices and outcomes. Secondly, the next key component examined is how cultural sensitivity can be applied to address healthcare problems such as racism, class, and gender to evoke equity, efficiency, and higher quality of care standards. Also, possible recommendations will be suggested focusing on integrating

cultural sensitivity training into healthcare practitioners practice, the monumental role of education, communication/information available to the public, and civic engagement to demand change of systems, which can promote equity and justice. Lastly, concluding thoughts will expand on the overall issue and hopefully make it more tangible and easier to digest.

### **What is culture and why is it important?**

Culture is a difficult and complex term. The concept of culture may be interpreted in various ways and carries different meanings depending on the social context and the people. Cultural anthropologist Kenneth Guest provides an effective and useful framework of culture as he states, “culture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, patterns of behavior, artifacts, and institutions that are created, learned, and shared by a group of people” (Guest 35). Culture is the essence of who people are and the foundation of people’s beliefs and identity. The world is very diverse encompassing many different religions, races, languages, and ethnicities. Many people occupy different regions around the world that they are either native to, or have migrated to for various reasons. Many cultures reside in the states and when victim to illness usually rely on the available healthcare, that being western medicine. If culture is so essential to a healthy, valued, and fulfilling life, then healthcare officials should be more aware and sensitive to the array of people’s needs. Whether people are conscious of it or not, culture is exhibited throughout daily life, either through afar or through personal interactions, circumstances, or events. Culture has many layers of complexities triggered by emotional responses therefore; cultural sensitivity ought to be an integral part of healthcare practitioner training. Providing a foundation of understanding assists the

notion of embracing differences and eliminates indulging into biases. This principle will help achieve efficient and quality healthcare.

So why is culture so important, and why should cultural sensitivity be included into the equation of healthcare? Everyone is part of a culture or multiple cultures, which can strongly influence modes of thinking and perceptions pertaining to “cause, prevention, and treatment” (NACHC Community Health Corps 4); therefore the world of medicine needs to not only be aware of cultural sensitivity, but apply it to have more equal and efficient healthcare. Understanding culture leads to ideals of cultural sensitivity, which can be applied to the world of medicine that can result in higher standards of equity, efficiency, and quality care in healthcare facilities. By embracing core ideals of cultural sensitivity compassion, understanding, and dignity will follow. This framework will allow for more personal relationships between the patient and healthcare provider, break down barriers or obstacles making it easier for the patient, and raise the bar for a higher level of care to be achieved for all people.

Cultural sensitivity is not necessarily such a new concept that requires another mode of thinking. However, it can be framed as a human rights or social justice issue that has been either ignored or forgotten about, due to the rapid lifestyle pace of modern society. Author Susan Mayor, from the British Medical Journal states, “Cultural sensitivity is essential to the success of policies to improve human rights, including those aimed at improving women’s health” (Mayor 1135). What is ironic and sadly disturbing about the situation, is that many people forget that the United States has a rich history of diversity that created the foundations of this country. Institutionalized racism has perpetuated stereotypes and discriminatory acts, creating great disparities

for many different cultural groups. It is imperative to raise awareness of this ongoing issue to promote justice and quality care for all people regardless of ethnicity, race, or other cultural backgrounds. Although possible solutions to injustices in healthcare seem daunting or unobtainable due to several factors, change needs to take place and it starts with acknowledging that there is a problem, raising awareness, and proceeding to look into possible solutions or remedies. Just like many social problems, it requires a lot of time, dedication, and hard work from multiple facets. Due to this complex nature of this issue, it is hard to stipulate an exact process in finding solutions that can heal such a massive problem. However, by examining culture's complexities as well as its implications, looking at cultural difficulties/differences, and its negative or positive influence in healthcare is the initial step in the process of addressing the situation to stimulate change.

Culture has so many layers of complexity and meaning, therefore it is imperative to dissect the essence of culture and see how it influences people's actions and perspectives. Many cultures exist in the United States due to the vast amount of immigration that has taken place throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The United States culture in and of itself is a blend of new cultural characteristics of American ideals and that of successful dominant European cultures. This cultural formula has negated aspects of other cultures "leaving behind their original language, values, and practices" (NACHC Community Health Corps 3). This is the idea of assimilation, which is the blending of cultures creating a dominant culture that controls aspects of societal life in regards to power, wealth, and decision-making. Due to this dominant cultural model, this has created many issues and perpetuated the concept of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a

bias examination of other cultures while believing their own culture is superior. Author Kenneth Guest, defines ethnocentrism when he states, “ethnocentrism is the belief that one’s own culture or way of life is normal, natural, or even superior, and the tendency to use one’s own culture to evaluate and judge the cultural ideas and practices of others” (Guest 44). If western medicine has an ethnocentric view and acts upon these beliefs, then many people from different cultures are experiencing some sort of disconnect or divide in regards to receiving proper and adequate healthcare.

The concept of acculturation is a rather new idea that encompasses cultures intermixing, which results in learning the beliefs and perspectives of the dominant culture while still keeping their personal and original culture alive. Through acculturation, people can still hold onto their original beliefs and cultural practices pertaining to language, values, belief systems, and behavior while adapting to the dominant culture. This concept allows people to come together as a whole and permits the survival of many different cultures. This concept is much more appealing, morally right, and just, rather than essentially losing one’s own original culture to learn another. All of these concepts and ideas such as: culture, ethnocentrism, assimilation, and acculturation play a pivotal role in the ethics of healthcare and if not managed properly, can lead to numerous damaging effects throughout society as a whole.

Cultural relativism and competency are terms that can be applied to help achieve a non-bias framework for interacting with cultures. These terms can be used as tools to stimulate open mindedness and acceptance. Guest defines cultural relativism as, “understanding group’s beliefs and practices within their own cultural context without making judgment” (Guest 44). Cultural relativism is a practical way of thinking in regards



to understanding different cultures without judgment and if this concept could be implemented more in healthcare practices, a higher level of care would be achieved on all levels. This cultural standard creates higher values, ethics, and ideals for healthcare professionals to abide by and use in their practices.

Culture is a term that can be rather broad and widespread, encompassing not just ethnicity, race, or religion, but is also dependent on socio economic class or status. A poor or high socio economic class takes on different characteristics of a particular group, which either can advance or in many cases limits abilities for a group of people to be acknowledged equally and/or receive proper healthcare. For example, authors of *Interpersonal Processes of Care in Diverse Populations* state, "Persons of lower socioeconomic status or from racial and ethnic minority groups have substantially poorer health and more health risk factors than their counterparts" (Stewart et al. 305). Class status can be categorized as a sub-culture; sharing one main thing in common, which is either lack of income and resources or an abundance of material goods, making life either uncomfortable or more comfortable depending on the circumstance. However, there are many other outside forces that can contribute to why people are trapped in a low socioeconomic status that suffer an array of healthcare disparities "ranging from differential social, environmental, economic, and lifestyle factors to differences in access to care" (Stewart et al. 305). Society has gentrified the sub-culture of a poorer economic class by increasing discriminatory actions, which lead to a hierarchy model instead of a model of equality. This is seen in healthcare as a social justice issue, which creates much more disparities for this sub-culture to overcome, resulting in a more divided country.

## **Definition of Cultural Sensitivity and Role to Improve Equality and Justice in Healthcare**

Awareness and competency of culture is essential to promote equality and justice in healthcare settings. This can be referred to as cultural sensitivity, which encompasses the philosophy of respect, care, dignity, and understanding, when considering treatment or providing care in any aspect. NACHC Community Health Corps provide a working definition of cultural sensitivity and demonstrate its relevance in healthcare by stating:

Cultural sensitivity embodies the knowledge, understanding, skills, and protocols that allow an individual or system to provide services across cultural lines in the best possible way. Cultural sensitivity permits us to respond with respect and empathy to people of all nationalities, classes, races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and other groups in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values their worth. (NACHC Community Health Corps 4)

Cultural sensitivity is important because many cultures have different beliefs in how to maintain their health. Therefore, cultural attitudes need to be sympathetic and empathic to understand how to approach the interpersonal dialogue appropriately between counterparts and to properly assess, provide, and expedite necessary care.

Cultural Sensitivity's goal in healthcare is to close the gap within healthcare providers' communication, and end bias views towards different cultures. Subsequently, this increased awareness of culturally sensitive practitioners could affect what type of healthcare decisions they process. Anita L. Stewart et al. states:

[W]hen informational processes are improved, the results may be better patient outcomes: patients gain more knowledge, achieve a sense of empowerment, garner the information they need to manage their own health, and feel more motivated and capable of managing their illness. (Stewart et al. 306)

Cultural sensitivity framework can be the building block to creating a better structure of systems that benefit all people resulting in ending many disparities and negative attitudes that cultures face throughout society on daily basis. NACHC Community Health Corps states:

[B]ecoming culturally competent is a developmental process: there will always be room for growth. To understand better where each of us currently stands in the process of becoming more culturally competent, it is useful to think of the possible ways of responding to cultural differences. As delineated by Terry L. Cross, M.S.W., there is a continuum or spectrum that ranges from cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency, that is, from negative attitudes and behaviors about diversity to positive ones. There are a variety of possibilities between these two extremes. (NACHC Community Corps 5)

By making the healthcare industry more accessible and sympathetic to different cultural needs this opens the playing field for more equality in all aspects of life. Although, implementing adequate cultural sensitivity into healthcare seems too idealistic, one must take into consideration that this philosophy is fluid, constantly changing, and adapting as time continues. The idea or concept of cultural sensitivity will never cease, but will grow as individuals accept, embrace, and carry out this practice into their daily

lives. Having a more inclusive community establishes more avenues of happiness and success for all the people instead of the few.

Cultural sensitivity should be a fundamental principle that guides people on how to respond to diversity in relation to how the world exists. This principle will help build deeper and stronger connections amongst many different people. This cultural clash or dilemma could be seen as a human rights issue in regards to the repercussions, limitations, and or abolishment of certain demographical or cultural groups of people. This way of thinking and action is potentially dangerous to serving the diverse public with equitable healthcare. It seems that society has fallen into a trap with the inability to see others as human beings. If it is possible to tap into the deepest consciousness of the human being, one would be able to see that we are all the same, striving for the same basic wants and needs, to have a valuable, healthy, and fulfilling life and legacy.

### **Cultural Sensitivity's Role in Achieving Equitable Healthcare**

Equitable healthcare should not seem so farfetched in a highly developed and industrialized nation that endorses human rights. In multiple countries there seems to be a universal acknowledgement of basic rights in which when a person is born should automatically receive. However, even in this advanced day and age different cultures feel discriminated against or oppressed. It seems that society and humans as a species make great strides in evolving, but at the same time regress. For example, in a case study conducted by Medical Care Journal, authors take a sample of low income cultural groups that reported, still feeling less empowered and disenfranchised however, the patient participants that were involved believe great progress is being made, but not at

the rate other people would like to see. The African American and Latino American group participants both argued for certain themes or ideas to be addressed which would fit the guidelines of being culturally sensitive. These themes were identified as: people skills, individualized treatment, effective communication, technical competence, and physical and social environment. Results in this case study revealed many similarities in disparities ethnic groups encounter:

[F]actors including physical environment characteristics (e.g., culturally sensitive art, pictures, music, and reading materials) and office staff behaviors were unique indicators of culturally sensitive healthcare identified by African American and Latino American participants but not by European American participants.

(Tucker et al 859)

These results can be implemented into healthcare professionals practice and care to execute more equitable healthcare to many people from diverse cultural backgrounds. If these categories are successfully addressed people feel empowered, trusting, and satisfied with the healthcare system and its professionals. Having equitable systems and policies created in which people feel empowered, and knowledgeable about their current medical situation, is the best way to apply medicinal practices in order to promote one's healing process.

The way in which western medical practices are conducted in healthcare facilities today, is not to say, it is highly inequitable, but shows that there is a need for overall improvement. Healthcare provider's actions that reciprocate into decision making are at times either intentional, or unintentional measures of inequality that greatly dictates

poorer health outcomes for those who fall under categorical constructs of lower socioeconomic class or minority status. The invisible barriers of stereotypes, discrimination, and racist thinking in healthcare create unhealthy by products, which perpetuate a system of inequality solely based from the individual's physical characteristics or attributes. Ethnocentric thinking is a prehistoric model and does not fit well into modern society's complex and diverse populations of culture. Therefore; cultural sensitivity could be used in healthcare as a measure to instill a more equitable landscape for the many diverse communities.

Healthcare benefits all people involved and has the possibility of being equitable, and if achieved could greatly diminish discriminatory acts, thinking, and can halt systematic oppression within other major institutions. This environment of fairness creates a structured system, which promotes shared/collective power, public empowerment, and easier access to more opportunities to benefit one's vitality. That is why it is essential for an institution like the healthcare industry that provides help to the ailing masses to not only believe in this framework, but also apply it, to be morally and justly sound when handling human lives. By implementing cultural sensitivity into healthcare, this will create a more equitable system breaking down the many barriers and obstacles members of diverse groups encounter such as: "issues of language, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, educational experience, and economic background" (NACHC Community Health Corps 9). Equitable healthcare translates into healthcare for all people.

### **Cultural Sensitivity's Role in Achieving Efficient Healthcare**

Cultural sensitivity infused into the healthcare field provides a greater amount of efficiency in regards to reaching many diverse groups of people and providing a non-bias approach to care, which can promote more beneficial services and provide further outreach. Efficiency in healthcare is rather complex and hard to define within means of providing diagnosis, care, and treatment. Efficiency in this case is representative of the patient and healthcare provider relationships, which outcomes translate into either beneficial, negative, or unsatisfying experiences that result in troubling health matters for many groups of people.

Efficiency corresponds to healthcare being expedited at a more beneficial measure for the patient. For example, if more healthcare providers exercise or accept cultural competency patients will feel satisfied on a personal level, and this concept will promote better healthcare outcomes. Efficiency can also be acknowledged through this light as indicated by Anita Stewart et al.:

[P]hysician's responsiveness to patients' concerns and expectations can be revealed by indicating that they have heard these concerns and/ or by suggesting strategies to address them. There is evidence that patients adhere better to instructions and experience more satisfaction with their treatment when their expectations of care are fulfilled and they find their clinicians to be responsive.

(Stewart et al 316)

If physicians and other providers demonstrate that they care about the patient's health by being empathic and sympathetic towards one's needs, then the patient feels more

satisfied, and appreciative on an individual basis, which then provides an accurate and efficient way of handling one's healthcare needs.

In expediting efficient care; healthcare professionals must not have an ethnocentric view, and should provide the utmost responsible decision making for the patient based on the foundation of human principle. For example, "Several studies demonstrate that minority and low social economic status patients desire more information than they receive and ask fewer questions than other groups" (Anita L. Stewart et al 317). Allowing for proper time during patient physician encounters, and seeing another person with dignity and compassion no matter what background, allows for this framework to thrive, and be beneficial for all communities involved. Physicians and other healthcare providers should be held to a professional standard in cultural competency, which will promote a healing service instead of the continuation of assumptions, or judgments that only perpetuate a problem of unequal healthcare measures. Cultural sensitivity can help bridge the gap pertaining to social and healthcare injustices that occur within diverse groups of people by creating, and implementing a feasible model of understanding others through compassion and dignity. Western medicine has seemed to move away from its core ideals and values in many ways. The whole healthcare realm have been blindsided by new mechanisms taking place in this industry, which is moving away from healthcare's core ideals and values and making the healthcare industry into a major business corporation whose main objective is revenue.

Efficiency in medical terms is in regards to healthcare facilities accumulating more overall profit and making their business successful. Big business model is the



exact problem that affects the diverse society of people; which is the route that healthcare facilities have turned to as time progresses, adaptation to change seems necessary for their survival. Efficiency then in healthcare is not necessarily focused on providing beneficial measures to address the patient; rather its focus is to have a high turnover rate of patients being seen to stimulate and drive profit margins. Many people are greatly affected by healthcare's obstacles and bureaucracy especially those who are from different ethnic backgrounds or poor social economic class and therefore, permeates a divide in providing efficient and adequate care on a larger and more beneficial spectrum. For example:

[T]he amount of information given may thus be inadequate for lower-social economic status or minority patients, suggesting a potential mechanism by which they experience poorer health outcomes than their counterparts. Patients value three types of explanation: about their clinical status, progress, and prognosis; about the technical processes of care; and about ways to facilitate autonomy, care for themselves, and promote their own health. (Anita L. Stewart et al 317)

Healthcare disparities continue to plague lower socio economic status and minority groups as stated by Anita L. Stewart et al., which still portrays an epidemic of injustice that has not been addressed for too many years.

The healthcare industry has assisted wide spectrums of communities, by adhering to their cultural beliefs of helping those in need. However, healthcare has changed their philosophy of efficiency turned into a business marketplace, in which success is measured by high revenue that is made possible by drawing consumers.

Unfortunately, insurance conglomerates only add to the problems that healthcare facilities have to absorb, and subsequently these issues of money and coverage are regurgitated back into the public, negatively impacting communities. Major insurance companies tend to have the upper hand in dictating whom, and what services at facilities will be covered. Insurance companies push healthcare facilities and providers into a profit driven business instead of looking out for the welfare of the public. Politics and policies set forth by insurance companies do not seem like they are in the best interest of the people in which they are serving. The dynamics of this situation develop even more of a disadvantage for those who cannot afford insurance, or do not understand how the process works to acquire insurance coverage. The dichotomy of this relationship between insurance corporations and healthcare facilities seems to only create more of a divide, inequities, and questionable ethics pertaining to welfare. Insurance coverage should be more widespread, to be more inclusive of the population as a whole, especially from lower socio economic, or ethnic status.

The rapid rate of diversity is continuing to skyrocket throughout all of the United States. Author Marcia Wells, from the Journal of Community Health Nursing states, "Nearly one third of the nation's population consists of ethnically diverse groups" (Wells 190). Diversity then is inevitably going to grow exponentially and healthcare providers need to respond to the urgency of disparities ethnic groups face. By responding to diversity with fair and efficient measures, objectives in care can be complete to restore health in the public's community. If efficiency in healthcare is neglected, many other aspects of appropriate care fall through the cracks such as: communication, interpersonal skills, and information given to patients regarding care, diagnosis, and

prognosis. These are the factors that constantly need amending to benefit society as a whole. If these areas are misrepresented it greatly affect outcomes of one's health.

The most common barrier, which impedes efficiency in healthcare, is that of communication. For example, if an ethnic individual goes into a healthcare center for some ailment, and does not speak English as a first language, services and outcomes might be very different. With language barriers patients can be seen as non-compliant or not willing to cooperate with medical staff to satisfy medical needs that are necessary. However, the reality maybe that this patient might not be able to understand their diagnosis, interventions through medicine management, and other appropriate protocol to help render their medical issue. Anita L. Stewart et al., further illustrates the lack of communication efficiency as she states:

[D]uring diagnosis and treatment, patients require explanations about what is happening and what to expect in terms of tests, procedures, treatment regimens, therapies, referrals, and follow up visits. Minority patients do not always receive explanations about these processes. A study of patient physician communication found that Latino women's physicians were less likely to discuss mammography, even though these women were just as motivated as non- Latino women to undergo screening if referred by physician. In another study, African-American women were less likely than white women to receive appropriate information regarding prenatal care. (Anita L. Stewart et al 317)

Withholding information is a poor way to communicate one's issues and limits advancement in necessary treatment that could preserve one's vitality. In addition not

providing explicit information providers lose their accountability, and reputation in these regards as the community becomes embellished with a sense of hopelessness, and powerlessness in many aspects of their daily lives.

Cultural norms and social constructs permit barriers that severely limit one's ability with instrumental debilitating effects. Norms and constructs were created to separate people by race, ethnicity, and class. The condoning of this concept fuels unequal treatment of others and can impact and impede efficiency measures in the healthcare field. The dangers that arise from this mode of thinking are when providers allow subscription to these types of actions and or thinking. Believing in constructs and norms hinders progress in healthcare because it perpetuates the notion of discrimination, and interferes with providing compassionate care. Actions, communication, and decisions should seem sound and trustworthy not questionable. Providers should steer clear from certain negative connotations of culture and strive for simply making human interactions, which can endorse a more equal outlook. The presence of equality in healthcare ensures that there is some type of efficiency or smooth system of operation in place that can reach, provide, and promote care to multitudes of diverse populations. One of healthcare's objectives is to be inclusive and representative of the diverse populations in which they care for.

### **Cultural Sensitivity's Role in Improving Quality of Care Standards**

Quality of care is hard to measure, but cultural sensitivity's role can improve experiences and outcomes for many patients. Before fully examining quality care, it is appropriate to take a step back to embrace culture's differences, to choose correct

access of execution. Wells offers insight to igniting progression in ways of which people view and embrace diversity stating:

[C]ultural diversity literature seems to suggest that success in meeting the challenges of diversity requires progression through developmental stages along a continuum. There is considerable variance in thought relative to the stages of cultural development and the learning task associated with each stage. (Wells 191)

That is why this philosophy of cultural sensitivity can be viewed and interpreted as an evolving process. Cultural acceptance is not something that can change overnight, it is a huge process that requires time for people to accept the current reality of rapid diversity, and change certain views or actions. However, this framework can open numerous doors of opportunity for permitting successful lives and longevity within the community.

Healthcare providers should be able to practice a wide scope of care to blanket the different individuals that formulate society. For instance, authors P.S. Seibert et al., in *Journal of Medical Ethics* states:

[T]hough not without debate, attention has turned to the need for something more than the traditional Eurocentric physician-patient role many know. With the current emphasis on best-practice models and outcomes, research has revealed that there is more to recovery than simply providing a one-size-fits-all plan of care. Without understanding the cultural context on which the client builds his/her

understandings of information, the managed care process will not succeed.

(Seibert et al 143)

An applied approach of cultural sensitivity can broaden avenues for the diverse public; by significantly increasing cultural competency, this principle enhances the caliber of quality care in healthcare facilities. Quality of care in these regards pertains to patients having needs and expectations met to have a fulfilling and valuable life. Countless cultures apply and understand care, treatment, and prevention much differently; therefore, to have exceeding successful results in overall care, significant work needs to be addressed in provider's practices. For example, Seibert et al., states:

[C]ulturally competent health care requires that the health professional be sensitive to the differences between groups, to the differences in outward behavior, and also to the attitudes and meanings attached to emotional events such as depression, pain, and disability. This model is used to improve the quality of care by recognizing culture's influence. (Seibert et al 143)

Understanding and embracing ideals of cultural sensitivity promotes admirable and humane attempts of satisfying people's needs. The results of implementing this principle develop non-judgmental care and produces healthier lifestyle remedies and choices.

Quality of care in facilities varies greatly and it seems that the standard of care is not universally sound. There are many determinants that play a role in adequate quality of care, and outcomes that can negatively affect its encounters with other cultures. Consistent obstacles that influence quality of care stem from communication, interpersonal skills, and information; if limited fuel discriminatory acts and stereotyping,

inhibiting opportunities to proper healthcare access. Healthcare facilities currently provide a variety of incomparable levels of care pertaining from satisfactory to good levels of care, but it seems that only a small percent of individuals are actually reaping these rewards, as other ethnicities face more adversity. Values and beliefs systems vary quite often, from an individual, to a cultural basis, since this is a reality providers need to come up with a new plan to integrate better health measures for the public as a whole.

Improving quality of care in healthcare facilities is a tall order to achieve and obtain for any duration of time. However, advancements in healthcare need to be made to provide appropriate care to reach the vast amount of the masses. Wells offers quite convincing statistics when she states:

[P]rojections estimate that by the year 2050 members of racially and ethnically diverse populations will comprise 50% of the U.S. population. These demographics suggest that nurses and other health care professionals will serve increasingly diverse populations. (Wells 190)

Diversity is only going to continue at a rapid rate, and providers need to improve their ways in how to respond respectfully with compassion. Cultural competency and sensitivity can be used as a catalyst to stimulate revolutionary measures and re-standardize the level of quality care. Maintaining consistency in regards to obtaining a high level of care is not unreachable, if negative perceptions about race and ethnicity are put aside. Making a new standard of care that is more personalized to the patient,

and their culture, empowers people, and makes a more level playing field for human rights to thrive.

Culture's perceptions greatly influence healthcare in many ways. Perceptions and cultural influence can be magnified when providers and patients from different cultures interact with one another to relate, and understand certain ailments, concerns, and prognosis. Understanding and applying cultural differences can expand the human capacity to carry out care with monumental amounts of compassion and dignity. However, it is breaking the current philosophy that has seemed to support the problem that continues a cycle of sub-standard or average care. Providers, and the institution of healthcare need to improve their awareness, by examining attributing factors that can cause better quality care and health outcomes for the diverse public.

There are enumerable amounts of contributing factors in determining better care and how to achieve this goal. Improvement in quality of care can develop by examining patient's experiences and outcomes through a cultural lens. By applying culture in relation to understanding differences, this teaching develops more meaning into applying, and performing practices by providers. In addition, other aspects can add to the overall experience of care, which can either negatively or positively affect provider's decision-making ability, or blindside patient's efforts to be successful in obtaining recovery. Looking into how patients can participate more in healthcare efforts is established by weighing in how much influence a patient's support system offers, or does not, which plays into a more inclusive display of better measures to acquire a higher standard of quality care.



Culture and one's support system should be taken into consideration by healthcare professionals to view best possible solutions to one's illness, to improve their experience, and receive good care. Looking into the patient's background and what has influenced their perceptions of healthcare helps in conducting higher quality of care. Not all people choose, or comprehend how to be actively engaged in assisting providers to conduct a more personalized healthcare measure that might fit them best. For example, Stewart et al., states, "It is important to determine how much patients would like to be involved in their own case. Depending on their culture, patients may or may not perceive that it is appropriate to take an active stance with respect to their clinicians" (Stewart et al 319). The perception of what seems to be culturally acceptable in patient and clinician relationships if not addressed appropriately, only add to more barriers and obstacles that can halt progression in ways of reassuring and executing proper care.

In other circumstances, many different cultures like to be informed and demand involvement from their support system, which usually is family and friends to help dictate a better care plan for the patient. Stewart, further illustrates this point when stating, "For some cultures, involving the patient's family in treatment decisions is the norm; clinicians may need to take into account their patients' views on this topic" (Stewart et al 319). Culture expresses and interprets conditions of health and illness differently. Therefore, if patients request for involvement of their family in assisting them in healthcare decisions as their cultural norm, providers should be respectful of this, and carry out professional decisions with keeping them in mind. This type of close attention is what creates higher levels of care to be achieved. Providing other alternatives for healthcare providers, such as, treating others with respect, compassion, and dignity

allows for the framework of cultural sensitivity to be successful and opens possibilities to reach higher levels of quality care.

### **Possible Recommendations**

There are many variables that are interconnected that play roles in conducting healthcare measures. As discussed above most of these issues stem from a way of thought that has created many limitations that subsequently impede appropriate healthcare measures for those in need. Wide spectrums of people from diverse and poor backgrounds are greatly affected, which impact aspects of one's livelihood, ability to thrive, and flourish. It is evident that culturally sensitivity presents a strong argument, and research solidifies that if executed well it can play a pivotal role in making healthcare more accessible and increase standards. Getting people involved from an array of communities and identifying their hardships or struggles in maintaining or seeking medical advice seems to be an area where discussion can lead to stimulating change. What follows may shed light on some possible solutions.

There is no easy way to resolve such a huge and complex problem of disparities in healthcare. Possible solutions vary from more accessible education outlets for the communities and providers, more awareness and better use of communication skills, civic engagement, and mandate cultural sensitivity training programs as necessary requirements for healthcare practitioners. A problem of this magnitude cannot be addressed overnight, but takes a lot of time and people's involvement. People need a starting point to initiate positive change, which can be beneficial for the very fast growing diverse public. If people demand for change, urgency of the issue brings it to

the surface and exposes obstacles and barriers that many have to jump over to sustain their health. A bottom up approach seems much more realistic and feasible rather than trying to overturn the whole healthcare industry.

Education in many cases can propel bridging the gap between culture and its influence in healthcare. Education should be more accessible for both the communities and providers. Being aware of different cultural beliefs, influence, and how this impacts one's experiences of healthcare can initiate a new way in which western medicine can become inclusive of all peoples. If more literature is available to a large amount of people, it will help promote and inspire new ways of thinking, which can develop into a more beneficial lifestyle for all. Education advances humanity and provides a landscape for more equality, which creates greater opportunities and access in all regards. Especially within healthcare, if more people knew about the intricacies and its inner works, perhaps there could be better modes of receiving and achieving sustainable health.

Awareness and communication of a problem is the beginning process to initiate positive change. Having literature readily available, and discussing patients' experiences catapult the severity of healthcare inequalities currently taking place. Having the public see factors that impede healthcare measures will create alternative routes to achieve more justice in healthcare. If the public is more aware of the negative nuances of healthcare and begin communicating about it with others, this can provide some type of urgency, that then inspires the healthcare industry to respond to the public's needs. However, if majority of people keep subscribing to the way in which the healthcare system operates it will create even more of a challenge and steadily continue

to divide the country. Change is slow and can be at times a grueling process.

Perseverance and determination from the public will only push matters to steamroll hopeful change.

Being proactive and civically engaged in healthcare processes is essential in conducting better health outcomes for the diverse public, encompassing different races, ethnicities, and cultures. The healthcare field and its providers cannot change unless the people in the healthcare industry change, and since this is not highly possible, civic engagement needs to propel a positive change for the people. If the public is more aware of healthcare disparities that occur on a daily basis, action may be soon to follow. In order for civic engagement to be successful, and efficient people must first start with awareness of the issue, realize that their little actions matter, and inspire change through discussion and dialogue, which will add up into making an enormous difference. This act of civic engagement is pivotal in manifesting and demanding higher standards of care for healthcare providers deliver. Civic engagement is a realistic principle and idea that if continuously pursued will inevitably bring upon change. In order for healthcare facilities to maintain and sustain their reputation and status, a mutual relationship is requested and needs people's participation on every level to influence direct outcomes.

The main focus in the healthcare industry is to stimulate change and achieve higher levels of equity and justice through a cultural sensitivity lens. Cultural sensitivity should be integrated into practitioners training to achieve better healthcare outcomes and options for their people they are serving. Cultural sensitivity should be a requirement as information on the subject at hand has correlated to improving healthcare

outcomes for everyone, especially those in poor socio-economic statuses, or of ethnic backgrounds; which can seemingly add another dimension to achieving a higher standard of care. Training healthcare providers to be more aware of culture and the strong beliefs systems that accompany culture, can provide a framework in which non-bias thinking and actions can become a reality. By creating training systems encompassing the effects of culture in healthcare then healthcare officials will be more properly versed in understanding culture's differences within the rapid rate of the growing diverse populous.

Permitting cultural training sessions for healthcare providers can serve the public in many essential ways. For example, by implementing nurses and providers into the healthcare field with knowledge regarding culture this type of action could result in lowering prejudices, lessening discriminatory acts, and abolishment of racist thinking. This type of a demonstration portrays a process of evolution, a new way of thinking, which can overtime eventually wipe out systematic oppression taking place in sacred institutions. Training providers in communication and interpersonal skills will allow and ensure more beneficial health measures for culturally diverse people. Embracing ideals that cultural sensitivity represents such as: compassion, understanding, and dignity will be outlined in training courses to mandate providers to practice and live out this type of philosophy. When providing or accessing care measures application of a cultural perspective allows for the provider to see his fellow patient as a human being that is in need and requires assistance. The dichotomy of this relationship will promote the most appropriate and successful care measures to ensure optimal recovery.

## Concluding Thoughts

Wells articulates culture's significance when she states, "Considerations of culture should be an integral part of our practice, our teaching, and our research" (Wells 197). Culture is a very complex and difficult term to define and understand. Influence of culture has seemed to be debatable for years, but as time progresses more research, literature, and education suggests that culture is an aspect that defines who people are, and play an extreme pivotal role in conducting equity, efficiency, and higher standards of quality care. Embracing an empathetic mind state converts into core ideals of compassion, dignity, understanding which can significantly dictate more personal relationships between patients and providers, resulting in better health measures and outcomes for the diverse population through intercultural interaction.

Culture can be viewed as having the power to influence many people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that either can negatively, or positively affect ways in which healthcare can be prescribed for better care outcomes to serve the masses of people. Negative views upon race and culture have been huge components that have driven prejudice, discriminatory, racist thinking, and actions that create more obstacles and barriers for those that are ethnic. The continuation of social constructs and norms also create more disadvantages for those who are not part of the dominant culture. Labeling and categorizing human beings has led only to more problems than good, new life principles of equality should be taught at a young age to instill peace, fulfilling values, and preservation of justice. Cultural sensitivity is a principle, philosophy, or practice to be understanding of differences and respond to diversity in a dignified manner. The philosophy of cultural sensitivity can be applied into healthcare to stimulate

change, to create a more equitable and equal level of care, more efficiency, higher standard of quality care, and promotion of justice that can reach all people, from all different backgrounds.

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