

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY IN THE HEALTHCARE CONTEXT

SESSION 1

OVERVIEW

Rick Harvey, an Assistant Professor in the Health Education Department at SFSU, Charlotte Ferretti, the Director the Marian Wright Edelman Institute at SFSU, Janet Egiziano, Associate Director of the Marian Wright Edelman Institute, and Rosario Alberro, the Associate Director of the Health Initiative of the Americas, facilitated a group discussion on the role of culture in healthcare. The session was attended by 16 participants, many of whom work in the healthcare setting. Other attendees include university faculty, ESL instructors, and community workers who serve the Chinese and Latino communities in the Bay Area.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Rick first posed the following question to the group: *What role does culture play in your work as a professional in healthcare or adult education?*

Political correctness was mentioned as something people struggle with, and someone asked the group what was being done in professional training schools to deal with this issue. It was mentioned that there is an effort to discuss diversity in medical schools, and it is woven into the curriculum now. However, a participant explained that oftentimes, culture is taught in a very simplistic manner and variation within groups is ignored.

Rick mentioned the importance of *cultural humility*, the idea that people should be humble enough to ask questions without worrying about embarrassment. The group agreed that this concept can be employed by both the patient and medical staff.

Participants were then asked to discuss the following question: *What should professionals in the field know about culture to be effective?*

One attendee mentioned the lack of literature on Asian communities and the difficulty in identifying and addressing issues within this population. Another participant brought up the need for better healthcare among groups that have often been ignored or neglected.

The group discussed the significance of language issues in immigrant healthcare. One attendee mentioned that often a true interaction might not take place between doctor and patient due to barriers around language and literacy.

To combat this problem, a suggestion for healthcare workers to use “teach back” techniques was brought up. For example, doctors or nurses can ask patients to repeat what they just said or explain it back to them.

Group members discussed the difficulty of being culturally sensitive due to time constraints and budget cuts, which often leads to shorter patient time. Additionally, a participant mentioned that

cultural competence is often jeopardized by the tendency in Western medicine to treat the disease instead of the person.

When the group was asked what possible collaborations could come out of today's discussion, Bruce Smith mentioned California Pacific Medical Center's ESL program for foreign-trained nurses.

Rosario discussed the importance of awareness when it comes to cultural issues. She brought up the need to train health providers in not only linguistics but also cultural concerns.

At the end of the discussion, participants were thanked for their informative comments.

REACTIONS

Attendees wrote the following comments about what they enjoyed during the session:

"Hearing about others' needs."

"The teach-back method!"

"The collaborative resources discussion at the end, where we learned about information and services offered by others."

"Evaluating the problems and proposing solutions (doing surveys, questionnaires)."

"People of diverse backgrounds sharing their own perspectives on health issues."

"Networking and a more human side of health attention."

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE FOR THEIR HELP AND SUPPORT WITH THIS SESSION

Rosario Alberro, Associate Director, Health Initiative of the Americas (facilitator)
Charlotte Ferretti, Director, Marian Wright Edelman Institute, SFSU (facilitator)
Rick Harvey, Assistant Professor, Health Education Department, SFSU (facilitator)
Priscilla Goh, SFSU undergraduate student (volunteer)
Bruce Smith, California Pacific Medical Center / SFSU MATESOL Alumni (notetaker)

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SESSION 2

OVERVIEW

Rick Harvey, an Assistant Professor in the Health Education Department at SFSU, Wylie Liu, Community Health Programs Manager at CPMC, and Charlotte Ferretti, the Director of the Marian Wright Edelman Institute at SFSU, led this group discussion on the importance of culture in medical settings. This session was attended by 46 participants, ranging from backgrounds in TESOL, the healthcare field, and community based organizations in the Bay Area.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Rick first posed the following questions to participants to discuss in small groups: *What role does culture play in your work as a professional in healthcare or adult education? What should professionals in your field know about culture to be effective in their practice or engagement of others? How can collaborations between healthcare professionals and educators work in terms of training professionals for the betterment of those groups?*

Attendees discussed many significant ideas and concerns, a few of which are mentioned below:

One group brought up the importance of language and culture when discussing communication. They mentioned that the symbol for suicide is considered bad luck in Chinese culture and therefore people will not even pick up a piece of paper with this symbol on it. Thus, when producing pamphlets and brochures, medical professionals need to be aware of this and use a different way of saying suicide when addressing a Chinese audience. This was one example of the importance of cultural awareness as the key to successful communication.

Another group mentioned that cultural competence goes far beyond gender and ethnicity. Instead, it entails being open-minded to the fact that everyone has a different story to tell. Adding to this, another attendee brought up the significance of *cultural humility* in terms of showing respect to patients. It was agreed that healthcare professionals might consider going into ESL classrooms to investigate patients' perspectives in this context instead of solely in a hospital.

When asked about possible next steps, it was suggested to have healthcare students work with immigrants as part of their pre-professional training in order to understand the needs of diverse populations. Additionally, someone brought up the idea of TESOL students observing a clinical setting in order to better learn what to teach immigrant learners. Group members were in agreement that an ongoing conversation between those in the TESOL and healthcare fields is pivotal to improving immigrant healthcare.

Participants were thanked for their hard work and thoughtful responses.

REACTIONS

When asked what steps they will take to follow up on what was discussed during this session, participants had the following to say:

“Contact some of my group members and to continue this discussion and share ideas.”

“Be more aware and more open to understanding that differences are there even amongst the same cultural groups.”

“Learn more about cultural humility.”

“Look to build partnerships with TESOL providers.”

“Connect with health care providers.”

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SUPPORT WITH THIS SESSION**

Charlotte Ferretti, Director, Marian Wright Edelman Institute, SFSU (facilitator)
Rick Harvey, Assistant Professor, Health Education Department, SFSU (facilitator)
Wylie Liu, Community Health Programs Manager, CPMC (facilitator)
Fang-yu Chou, Assistant Professor, Nursing, SFSU (discussant)
Amy McCarthy, MA TESOL student - volunteer
Emily Harms, MA TESOL student - volunteer