
Professional Communication: Cultural Sensitivity

Introduction

“A nation’s culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people.” -Mahatma Gandhi

America is a land where immigrants and minorities from different cultural backgrounds and heritages come together to adopt one common culture. From the beginning of time, the term ‘culture’ has often been associated with social behavior, norms, values, identities and the way in which different people react to different circumstances. It is because of these very attributes that organizations including the healthcare industry gives high priority to cultural diversity. It encourages its employees to foster good ethical values and adopt professional communication to render quality care to patients coming from diverse cultural backgrounds.

“Culturally discordant care arises from unaddressed cultural differences between health care providers and patients” (DeNisco & Baker, 2016). As a nurse one of the most essential skills that I had to learn was addressing the needs of immigrant patients with cultural sensitivity. For two decades I worked in a hospital where I was assigned the task of dealing with Hispanic patients. Being an immigrant myself I found this experience quite daunting mainly due to language barriers. Nevertheless, it was this experience that broadened my horizons and enabled me to learn the importance of professional communication when dealing with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Since most of my experiences involved dealing with Hispanic patients, I decided to focus on the Hispanic community to state the importance of professional communication and cultural sensitivity.

Summary

Effective communication skills are a fundamental necessity in transcribing quality care to diverse communities. In the healthcare care industry, it is this very skill that keeps the team informed, motivated and enables them to deal sensitively with people of other cultural orientations. Miscommunication can lead to harmful outcomes in patient care. “The Purnell Model of Cultural Competence is proposed as an organizing framework to guide cultural competence among multidisciplinary members of the healthcare team in a variety of primary, secondary and tertiary setting” (Purnell, 2005) The twelve domain of this concept helps in assessing the cultural attributes of an individual, family, and community.

Cultural sensitivity can be followed along with Cultural Competence. Most Hispanics living in The United States share a common language. This being said they do however differ in their extension of acculturation which in turns relates to their level of education and income. While some prefer to be identified as Latinos, others prefer to be called Hispanics while there are few others who like to be identified as neither Latinos nor Hispanics. Most of them have a patriarchal family system and live with extended family. They are separated by their origins, customs, and traditions. They are sympathetic towards one another and take pride in their cultural heritage.

Although the Hispanic community shares a common language, it is important to note that their cultures, values, and beliefs differ from one another. Each of them have their own beliefs and

ideologies when it comes to illnesses and treatments. While some rely on drugs and medication prescribed by a doctor there are others who do not prefer drugs and rely on herbs or natural ingredients to cure ailments. It is due to this belief that many Hispanic patients tend to be non-compliant to their treatment plan. This is where a clear understanding of a patient's culture and ideology helps healthcare professionals to take the necessary steps to educate the patients so that they can make an informed decision.

Application of Practice

The issues of stereotyping and generalizations have been a common occurrence in the healthcare industry especially because a large number of patients are addressed at once. Hispanics have a common language but are separated by their area of origin. American Mexicans do not like to be identified as Puerto Ricans or associated to any other place of origin. They take pride in their heritage, which is why it is important for all healthcare personnel to take an interest and learn more about every patient's cultural background before addressing them. A clear understanding of an individual's background, heritage, and specific characteristics helps professionals to create a healthcare plan that is customized to meet the needs of every individual patient.

Knowledge about culture and orientation helps nurses and other healthcare professionals to render special attention to things that may seem trifle but can mean a great deal to their patients. One such instance took place during the flu season in the year 2005 where children were not allowed to visit the hospitals as a preventive measure. As most Mexicans tend to live with their extended families, it so happened that a patient's extended family came to visit their loved one. Since the hospital that I worked with gave high priority to rendering nursing care that is non-judgmental, respectful and sensitive to people from different cultural backgrounds we were able to make special accommodations so that children could visit their loved ones.

Cultural competence and sensitivity not only enhance communication but also leads to professional growth and improved patient-family satisfaction. Culturally driven care can help address the needs and concerns of many patients. Since many Hispanic patients come from a poor socio-economic situation there are several instances where they may not be eligible for insurance policies and end up resorting to home remedies for treatment. As it is the responsibility of a nurse to ensure the betterment of a patient, there is a need to understand their practices which can help nurses recommend a more suitable medication regimen that can prevent adverse side effects.

Apart from cultural sensitivity, another essential skill is effective communication while dealing with Hispanic patients. The use of interpreters, verbal and nonverbal forms of communication can help enhance the care given to patients. Instruction written in a language that patients are familiar with can enable them to take their medication in a way that has been prescribed by the doctors thereby avoiding risks. Today technology is so advanced that we can use Google translation in communication with our patients. It is because of technological advancements like these that we are no longer just citizens of our country of origin, but rather global citizens since we now possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to function in a cultural community thereby maintaining our uniqueness, diversity, and unity.

Conclusion

“Achieving cultural competence indicates the ability to respond effectively to the cultural needs of our patients.” (DeNisco & Baker, 2016). Today Nurse educators acknowledge the importance of cultural competence and ensure that every graduate student practices culturally competent care towards their patients. Effective communication between the caregiver and the patient can help contribute towards the betterment of the healthcare system and the society at large. After all, it is culturally based care that builds a healthcare system founded on trust, mutual respect, comfort, and holistic healing.

References

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