

# History, Communication, and Cultural Empathy: The Keys to Improved Patient Engagement

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## Disclosures

- I have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this program/presentation.

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- Define Cultural Empathy.
- Identify how and why culture affects nutrition and healthcare outcomes.
- Discuss methods to reduce cultural and communication barriers between patient and provider to improve patient engagement.
- Provide resources available to registered dietitians and healthcare providers to support practice in an increasingly diverse population.

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### Food is Life.

Dietitians have the unique and exciting job of engaging patients about their food practices, behaviors, and preferences.

Food/Eating is considered to be central to almost every culture's society.

It is not enough to learn WHAT foods are central to a culture. We must explore the *HOW, WHY, WHEN, and WITH WHOM* if we want to truly have an impact.




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Cultural and ethnicity affects views of food and the role of food in health, social, and emotional settings.

- *Where food is eaten*
- *How food is prepared (cleaned, cooked, served)*
- *Who makes the food choices*
- *Traditional foods for celebrations, mourning, religious ceremonies, etc.*
- *Dietary remedies for illness and disease*
- *Where food is purchased (Access to food)*
- *Fasting*

• **Cultural Empathy\***: intercultural skill that is marked by the ability to understand and communicate another person's thoughts and feelings, given the person's cultural context.

\*"But I Wouldn't Do That": Teaching Cultural Empathy Julie A. Dodge George Fox University jldodge12@georgefox.edu

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# History of Minority Populations and Healthcare/Nutrition

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"Those who don't study history are doomed to repeat it. Yet those who do study history are doomed to stand by helplessly while everyone else repeats it."

**...Not on our watch!**

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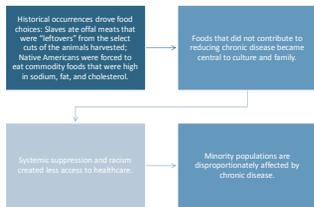
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## History of Minority Populations and Cultural Foods



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- "On a typical day, the field slaves rose to eat a breakfast of buttermilk and crumbled cornbread mixed up and poured into a trough, a noontime "dinner" of boiled vegetables with some meat to flavor it and some red pepper for seasoning, and then a late-evening supper of leftover dinner portions and cold cornbread."  
 – Adrian Miller, *An Illustrated History of Soul Food*

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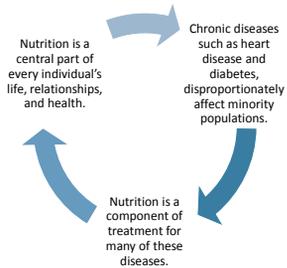
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### Culture Affects Patient Engagement

- Historically, some cultures have had tumultuous relationships with healthcare:
  - African-Americans
  - Native Americans
  - Hispanics

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**Cultural Explanations**

- Explanatory Models of Illness: "People develop conceptual models to make sense of illness or conditions and cultural groups share similar models."
- Each culture has a system of beliefs to:
  - Explain cause of illness
  - How to cure and treat illness
  - Who should be the provider of care
- In Creole culture, "Traiteurs" are often turned to for healing for common ailments including constipation, colic, headaches, and many more.



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## Why Must We Being to Understand?

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Pedersen, Crethar and Carlin describe "Inclusive Cultural Empathy" as having two defining features:

- Culture is defined broadly to include "culture teachers" from the client's ethnographic (ethnicity and nationality), demographic (age, gender, lifestyle, residence), status (social, educational, economic) and affiliation (formal or informal) backgrounds, and
- ...The empathic counseling relationship values the full range of differences and similarities or positive and negative features as contributing to the quality of that relationship in a dynamic balance (2008, p. 42).

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Improving Cross-Cultural Nutrition Assessment

- Bilingual nurses and dietitians
- Persons from the community as community health workers
- Focus groups for the development of programs and materials
- Telephonic technology
- Culturally appropriate language of instruction

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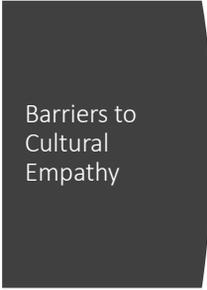
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Barriers to Cultural Empathy

- Unawareness of culture; lack of interaction and contact with people of a certain culture
- Overstressing the universals of cultures and neglecting the differences between them
- Indiscriminate application of one's own cultural customs to the target culture

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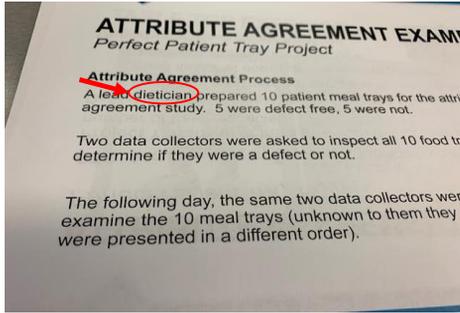
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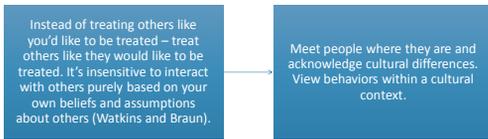
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### Putting Cultural Empathy Into Action




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| Developing Cultural Empathy                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Set aside your own biases and judgments.</b>                                       | The newly diagnosed, age 35, African-American male CKD Stage 4 patient's EMR states that the patient is "non-compliant".                                                                                      | Acknowledge your own biases. Learn about the patient and his background.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Listen for the core message in what the client is saying.</b>                      | You describe a recipe to the patient you are counseling for hypertension and she smiles responds, "Oh, I bet your family likes that recipe!"                                                                  | The patient may be saying that this is good for YOUR family, but not mine. Did you ask the patient about food preferences? Did you allow her to make suggestions?                                                                                                                   |
| <b>"Listen" for both verbal and non-verbal messages.</b>                              | You provide education to the patient and they have just nodded their head in agreement.                                                                                                                       | Did you continue to educate with the goal of "completing the education"? Could you have asked open ended questions? Ask if they'd like someone else to attend with them? There could be a language barrier, a cultural norm that says do not question the provider, or many others. |
| <b>Be flexible – this gives patients room to share their thoughts and experience.</b> | You have to provide a patient newly diagnosed with diabetes with education. In the hour scheduled, you review physiology of diabetes, signs and symptoms, meal planning, blood sugar and meal record keeping. | Do you know if the patient has any beliefs about food that may affect his treatment? Did you spend time developing rapport with the patient?                                                                                                                                        |

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# Summary

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Cultural Empathy is essential for effective and adequate communication and engagement.

- Be purposeful and maintain open communication with patient. Always seek ways to communicate without bias and encourage patient's communication.
- Acknowledge that there are basic differences in diet, communication (verbal and non-verbal), and many other areas.
- Examine your own bias and seek to learn more about other cultures.
- Be flexible in your communication, education plan, and purpose of counseling.
- Always refrain from judgment.
- Take time to learn about other culture – not just the food and nutrition, but the cultural practices, celebrations, and norms.

From Intercultural Awareness to Intercultural Empathy Honglin Zhu School of Foreign Languages, Changzhou University

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## Resources

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Think Cultural Health**  
<https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/resources/library>

**Massachusetts General Hospital Empathy and Relational Science Program**  
[https://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/research/empathy\\_resources.aspx](https://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/research/empathy_resources.aspx)

**AND EAL Systematic Review on Cross-Cultural Communication**  
[https://www.andeal.org/topic.cfm?cat=4312&evidence\\_summary\\_id=251138&highlight=culture&home=1](https://www.andeal.org/topic.cfm?cat=4312&evidence_summary_id=251138&highlight=culture&home=1)

**Common Sense Models of Diabetes**  
Grzywacz, J. G., Arcury, T. A., Ip, E. H., Chapman, C., Kirk, J. K., Bell, R. A., & Quandt, S. A. (2011). Older adults' common sense models of diabetes. *American journal of health behavior, 35*(3), 318-33.

**Counseling Across Cultures** edited by Paul B. Pedersen, Walter J. Lonner, Juris G. Draguns, Joseph E. Trimble, Maria R. Scharron-del Rio

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