



HNS Best Practices – Cultural Competency

The ultimate goal of Cultural Competence is a health care system and workforce that can deliver the highest quality of care to every patient, regardless of race, ethnicity, and cultural background.

Cultural competence is defined as the ability of providers and organizations to effectively deliver health care services that meet the social, cultural, and linguistic needs of patients.

To accomplish this, we must first improve our ability to communicate effectively across barriers of language and culture which directly affects patient safety, patient treatment and treatment outcomes.

Cultural competence is not an isolated aspect of medical care, but an important component of overall excellence in health care delivery. It is also important to note that understanding cultural differences and improving our ability to communicate effectively with all patients, also helps safeguard against potential liability and malpractice claims.

To promote awareness among contracted health care professionals of the importance of cultural competency in the delivery of care, and to improve the delivery of culturally competent health care, HNS has developed best practices for cultural competency which establish HNS' performance expectations for contracted health care professionals.

Best Practices for Cultural Competency:

1. Value Diversity

Respect all cultures. In other words, do not merely tolerate people of differing backgrounds and viewpoints, but consider differences as strengths.

2. Self-Awareness

Recognize any personal biases against people of different cultures and work to eliminate them.

3. Awareness and Acceptance of Differences

Understand the way the "person/client" defines health and family and how one's own culture influences how one thinks and acts.

Always be aware of the influences that sociocultural factors have on patients, physicians, and the clinical relationship.

Respect cultural differences regarding physical distance, physical contact, eye contact, and rate and volume of voice.

4. Dynamics of Differences

Be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact. Two people may misjudge the other's actions based on learned expectations. Both will bring culturally prescribed patterns of communication, etiquette and problem solving. Also, both may bring stereotypes or underlying feelings about working with someone who is different. Without an understanding of their cultural differences, misinterpretations or misjudgments may occur.

5. Emphasize relationship building and communication.

The key to all relationships is a stable foundation based on clear and honest communication of thoughts, feelings, ideas and emotions. Especially in the medical field, healthcare professionals must be committed to establishing a line of trust and truthfulness in order to best decipher how to serve a patient's needs. In the last decade, numerous researchers have linked quality communication between patients and healthcare professionals to an increase in patient satisfaction, positive health outcomes and even willingness to adhere to treatment plans.

6. Accept Responsibility

Recognize your responsibility for understanding the cultural aspect of health and illness.

Accept responsibility to help combat racism, classism, ageism, sexism, homophobia, and other kinds of biases and discrimination that occur in health care settings.

7. Knowledge of Patient's Culture

Become familiar with aspects of culture that may impact your patient's approach to health care. Find out each patient's cultural background. Elicit patient expectations and preferences. Share your knowledge with all staff members.

On your intake forms, include questions about race, ethnicity, language(s), religion, and age, or ask the patient to discuss his or her cultural background during the initial interview.

8. Adaptation

As appropriate, make sure your programs, services and marketing material reflect an understanding of diversity between and within cultures.

9. Bridge the Language Barrier

Make sure you have interpreters ready to assist individual with limited English speaking/reading proficiency. (The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires all health care professionals to Provide free language assistance services to people whose primary language is not English.)

10. Be sensitive to any religious considerations

Religious diversity and understanding also plays an important role in community education. If a patient, for example, is of a conservative faith, they may have difficulty relating to healthcare professionals they view as cavalier toward their feelings of science and religion. By teaching medical specialists and advocates the importance of religious sensitivity, the session with the patient will go much smoother and without excess feelings of judgment or pressure from either party.

Additional strategies for improving the patient/physician interaction include:

1. If possible, recruit and retain minority staff.
2. Provide training to increase cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills.
3. Incorporate culture-specific attitudes and values into marketing and promotional tools.
4. Include family and community members in health care decision making.
5. Consider expanding hours of operation.
6. Provide linguistic competency that extends beyond the clinical encounter to the appointment and medical billing staff.

HNS Solutions

1. HNS has identified the top 6 populations in our service area and has provided helpful information about the culture of each one to help you communicate more effectively and in a manner that is considerate of their beliefs and values. Take time to review these and review them with your staff.
2. To help improve communication with patients with limited English speaking skills, HNS provides free, in-office interpretation services through our contract with CyraCom, an international language interpretation services organization. CyraCom provides interpretive services in over 200 languages.
3. To assist those individuals with limited English reading skills, HNS also provides many of our clinical and administrative forms in Spanish, including but not limited to, outcome assessment forms, informed consent form, HIPAA Privacy Notice and patient waiver forms. (Additionally, the "Member" section of the HNS website is also available in Spanish.)
4. To assist those individuals with limited English skills in locating a physician in their community who speaks their language, HNS publishes additional languages spoken by network physicians in the HNS online Provider Directory. This information is also provided to our contracted payors for inclusion in their provider directories.
5. If you speak a language other than English and wish to have the language published in HNS and payor provider directories, let your HNS Service

Representative know, and we will work to ensure this information is made available in both HNS and payor provider directories.

6. HNS also provides guidelines, strategies and additional resources to help you become more culturally competent.

7. Interpreter Tips

Below are techniques to more effectively communicate with your patients and/or their family members:

- Reassure the patient about confidentiality.
- Inform the interpreter of specific patient needs
- Hold a brief introductory discussion (your name, organization and nature of the call.)
- Allow enough time for the interpreted sessions.
- Avoid interrupting during interpretation.
- Speak in the first person.
- Speak in a normal voice, try not to speak fast or too loudly.
- Speak in short sentences.
- Avoid acronyms, medical jargon and technical terms.
- Face and talk to the patient directly.
- Be aware of body language in the cultural context