Cultural Competency for Health Administration and Public Health

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Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this work to my husband, Jeffrey Rose, and our children, Courtney and Brandon Rose, whose presence has given my life deep meaning and purpose and filled it with love and pride.
# Table of Contents

| Preface | ix |
| Acknowledgments | xiii |
| About the Author | xv |

## Chapter 1

**Introduction** ................................................................. 1

## Chapter 2

**Cultural Competence and Diversity: Is There a Difference?** ............................................. 9

### Learning Objectives ......................................................... 9
### Key Terms ........................................................................ 9
### Introduction ................................................................. 9
### Demographic Changes ..................................................... 10
### Cultural Competence ..................................................... 12
### Linguistic Competence ................................................... 12
### Diversity, Race, and Ethnicity .......................................... 14
### The Importance of Cultural Competency for Healthcare Organizations and Public Health .......... 21
### Students ........................................................................ 23
### Fiscal Accountability and Cultural Competency .............. 23
### Accreditation and Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Healthcare Standards .......... 24
### Conclusions .................................................................. 25
### Chapter Summary ......................................................... 25
### Chapter Problems ......................................................... 25

## Chapter 3

**Health Service Administration and Public Health and the Paradigm Shift** ............................. 29

### Learning Objectives ......................................................... 29
### Key Terms ........................................................................ 29
### Introduction .................................................................... 29
### The Need for a Paradigm Shift ......................................... 30
### Expansion of Minority Markets ....................................... 31
### Investing in Cultural Competence ................................... 32
### The Business Aspect of Health Care ............................... 33
### Decreasing Malpractice Claims ...................................... 36
### Enhanced Customer Service and Quality of Care ............ 36
### Conclusions ................................................................... 37
### Chapter Summary ......................................................... 37
### Chapter Problems ......................................................... 38
Table of Contents

Conclusions ..............................................................................................79
Chapter Summary...................................................................................79
Chapter Problems ..................................................................................79

Chapter 7  
Cultural Competency and Assessment ....................................83
Learning Objectives ..............................................................................83
Key Terms ............................................................................................83
Introduction ..........................................................................................83
Attitudes ..............................................................................................84
Assessment ..........................................................................................84
A Cultural Competence Assessment Tool .........................................87
Importance of Reliable and Valid Assessment Tools .....................87
Conclusions ...........................................................................................88
Chapter Summary ..................................................................................88
Chapter Problems ..................................................................................89

Chapter 8  
Cultural Competence Training .........................................................91
Learning Objectives .............................................................................91
Key Terms ............................................................................................91
Introduction ..........................................................................................91
The Significance of Cultural Competence Training ......................92
Approaches to Training .........................................................................92
Elements Needed to Ensure Successful Training Programs ..........93
The Need for Cross-Cultural Education and Other Training Essentials .........................................................................................................................94
The Importance of Providing Key Terms Relevant to Cultural Competence .........................................................................................................................95
Key Components of Cultural Competence Training ......................96
Evaluation of Cultural Competence Training ....................................97
Conclusions ...........................................................................................99
Chapter Summary ..................................................................................99
Chapter Problems ..................................................................................99

Chapter 9  
Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services Standards: An Overview ..............................................103
Learning Objectives .............................................................................103
Key Terms ............................................................................................103
Introduction ..........................................................................................103
Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Standards .....................104
The Need for CLAS Standards and Action Plans for Administrators.........................................................................................................107
Qualitative Research .............................................................................108
Conclusions ...........................................................................................110
Chapter Summary ..................................................................................110
Chapter Problems ..................................................................................111
Chapter 10  The Ultimate Challenge: Educational and Institutional Considerations .................................113

Learning Objectives .................................................................113
Key Terms .................................................................................113
Introduction ..............................................................................113
The American Medical Association ........................................114
The Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education ...........................................115
The Joint Commission ..............................................................115
The Council on Education for Public Health .........................116
The Institute of Medicine .........................................................116
The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality ..................117
The Sullivan Commission .........................................................117
Necessary Educational Requirements .....................................118
Challenging Health Services Administrators and Public Health Practitioners ...........................................119
Conclusions .............................................................................120
Chapter Summary ..................................................................120
Chapter Problems ..................................................................121

Chapter 11  Cultural Competence and Women of Color ..................123

Learning Objectives ................................................................123
Key Terms .................................................................................123
Introduction ..............................................................................124
Needs Assessment ....................................................................124
Women of Color as a Special Needs Population ....................129
Case Study 1............................................................................131
Case Study 2............................................................................134
Case Study 3............................................................................135
Case Study 4............................................................................137
Conclusions .............................................................................138
Chapter Summary ..................................................................140
Chapter Problems ..................................................................140

Appendix I  Cultural Competence Assessment Survey: Executive Team and Management ..................143
Appendix II  Cultural Competence Assessment Survey: Staff .................................................................147
Appendix III  Cultural Competence Assessment Survey: Providers ....................................................151
Appendix IV  Glossary of Important Terms .........................................................................................155
Appendix V  Web Sites and Resources .................................................................................................163
Appendix VI  Cultural Competence Plan .............................................................................................167

Index ......................................................................................169
Preface

In my roles in the field of health as a professor, consultant, writer, health service administrator, and researcher, I became keenly aware of the need for cultural competence in health service administration and public health. My awareness actually peaked while teaching at a university in south Florida where a majority of the students (master’s of public health and medical) and faculty were from the mainstream population in the United States. In exploring where many of the students planned to practice after completing their degrees, namely communities comprised of minorities (south Florida and most major cities in the United States are very diverse), discussions led to the fact that they had limited or no insight into the cultures of those they planned to serve and their curriculum did not address this deficit.

Consequently, as a faculty member, I was asked to develop a series of lectures on various aspects of culture to supplement the curriculum of the medical and public health students. This led to my exploration of the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards in health care, which were released by the Office of Minority Health (OMH) of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in December of 2000 (OMH DHHS, 2000). Additionally, in an effort to further enhance my cultural knowledge and to gain more insight before, during, and after the cultural competence lectures, I traveled to many countries in Latin America (the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico [a US territory], Mexico), Central America (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Belize), the Caribbean (Jamaica, the Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Aruba), Africa (Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and the Cape Verde Isles), Fiji, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Europe (Spain, the Netherlands, Corsica, Portugal, France, and Italy). My travels and extensive study led to an enhanced understanding of various cultures and cultural nuances.

A particularly interesting turning point for me as I proceeded with this travel and study, was the reading of a book titled The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down in which Fadiman (1997) states:

There are no funds in the hospital budget specifically earmarked for interpreters, so the administration has detoured around that technicality by hiring Hmong lab assistants, nurse’s aides, and transporters, who
are called upon to translate in the scarce interstices between analyzing blood, emptying bedpans, and rolling postoperative patients around on gurneys. . . . Obstetricians have had to obtain consent for cesarean sections or episiotomies using embarrassed teenaged sons, who have learned English in school, as translators. Ten-year-old girls have had to translate discussions of whether or not a dying family member should be resuscitated. (p. 25)

*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* is a compelling story of the suffering of a Hmong child with epilepsy within the American healthcare system. The incidents of linguistic and cultural incompetence that took place, negatively impacting the provision of health care for the child, are very disheartening. The idea that one’s health care could be compromised because of a lack of understanding of one’s culture and the inability to communicate with patients/clients/customers by healthcare and public health professionals seems implausible but is often a reality.

As described by Reynolds (2004):

The care that Lin receives leads to misdiagnosis and eventual decline in health care status as a result of communication barriers and lack of understanding from both the Lee family and her providers. Fadiman’s account allows the reader to begin to understand dimensions of the Hmong cultural identity and the challenges that the U.S. health care system faces in adequately addressing the health needs of a defined population. (p. 241)

Furthermore, the lack of cultural competence in health care and public health is not only a problem in terms of language barriers (linguistic competence) for people who arrive in the United States from other nations to seek care but is also a problem for Americans who are born and raised in the United States and who only speak English. Take my mother, for example. Many years ago (she is now deceased), she became gravely ill. One of her primary illnesses was diabetes. Her doctor and nutritionist strongly encouraged her to change her diet and were quite firm with her when she failed to comply. Her doctor and nutritionist requested that a family member accompany her for her next visit, and I was selected by my mother to escort her. During this visit, I explained to her doctor and nutritionist, upon hearing their concerns, that although she lived in New York City and had done so for most of her adult life, she had been reared in Georgia and, consequently, her diet was primarily soul food, which she preferred. I further explained that she enjoyed cooking and prepared meals based on recipes that had been passed on in her family for many generations. The doctor
and nutritionist asked me why she never told them this when they insisted that she change her diet. When I asked my mother why she did not tell them, she simply responded by saying, “They did not ask me.” I proceeded to explain to the doctor and nutritionist, who were both white Americans, that soul food has a historical basis and was composed, in terms of its origin, of the remnants left by the slave masters after they ate the best parts of meat and the finest of all foods for their meals. The slaves took the scraps that were provided by their masters and turned them into tasty, highly seasoned dishes (often with a high salt content). Since my mother was an African American and a descendant of slaves, as most African Americans are, these dishes became a staple of her diet. The problem is that soul food is generally high in salt, fat, and sugar and includes frying as a mainstay of the preparation process. My suggestion to her doctor and nutritionist (as well as to my mother) was that she modify her diet rather than change it completely because the foods she ate and prepared were a significant cultural norm for her. Asking her to do otherwise was creating a serious cultural barrier and was leading to noncompliance, stress, and lack of communication that was exacerbating her overall health rather than helping her. This explanation helped in her care at the time because it promoted understanding and appreciation by her nutritionist and doctor regarding her food choices.

There is a great deal of miscommunication between patients/clients/customers and people in health care at various levels (staff and providers) and public health. The United States made a solid, concrete step toward improving the efficacy of health care and public health when, as mentioned earlier, the OMH released the CLAS standards. These 14 standards are guidelines, recommendations, and mandates aimed at ensuring that patients/clients/customers who seek care are treated with dignity, respect, and understanding in terms of their cultural and linguistic needs.

In reviewing these standards and other relevant topics and relating the information specifically to health services administration and public health, I have attempted to make this book, which provides an overview of cultural competence, a comfortable read with straightforward, comprehensible, and specific details. I believe that there are specific and important responsibilities that health service administrators and public health practitioners must meet in the provision of service and information. Therefore, it is imperative that healthcare executives and public health practitioners develop plans and initiatives to ensure that this occurs.
Acknowledgments

I came to realize during the writing of this textbook that the saying “no man is an island,” or in this case “no woman is an island,” is a valid statement. To that end, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to a number of individuals who made this work possible. First, I begin with Vincent Omachanu, who provided excellent expertise for the establishment of reliability and validity of the cultural competence assessment surveys that comprise the first three appendices of this book. His expertise during our work on the survey project was offered with kind and expert assurance, and I thank him for that. I would also like to thank my colleague, Dr. Anthony Munroe, the former CEO of Economic Opportunity Family Health Center, Inc., in Miami, Florida, now aptly entitled the Jessie Trice Center for Community Health. During my tenure at the center as a Cultural Competence Consultant and subsequently as Vice President of Behavioral Health Services, I was able to implement a cultural competence action plan with his approval and with an excellent administrative team. This was an excellent opportunity to see the positive impact that cultural competence has when implemented correctly by health services administration and the implications for public health organizations.

Additionally, I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Edmund Abaka, Director of the Africana Studies Program at the University of Miami. Through his efforts to expand the program and create a rich learning experience for students, he offered the opportunity for the development of new courses that I was ready and willing to handle in the capacity of adjunct and then visiting assistant professor, a role that I currently hold in his program along with a joint appointment in American Studies. The new courses that are relevant to this text are Black Women in Medicine and Healing, Race and Health Care in America, and Culture, Race and Diversity. These courses enable discourse around the topic of cultural competence with an opportunity to provide insight to interested and enthusiastic students. I also thank my former research assistants, Stephanie Fenton and Paulo Pires, for their efforts. I am grateful for their assistance and acquisition of information relevant to this text.

I am grateful to Dr. Patrick Williams, who served as a sounding board, encourager, and ardent taskmaster. His understanding of the process of preparing this text was profound because he was completing his dissertation...
at the University of Miami at the time of my writing, so there was substantial opportunity for critical analysis based on similar intellectual tasks. Furthermore, I express my great appreciation to my excellent Barry University health services administration students, namely the Miami Children’s Hospital cohort, for their excellence in my seminar course entitled *Cultural Competence in Health Services Administration*, a new course that I was asked to develop and teach. It enabled intense discourse on the subject of cultural competence and the opportunity to delve deeply with health service administrators who have the capacity to implement cultural competence initiatives in their work environment. Hence, I want to thank Dr. Alan Whiteman, Chair of the Department of Health Services Administration, for affording the opportunity for me to teach such outstanding master’s level students.

Finally, but with the utmost gratitude and appreciation, I acknowledge my family, especially my husband, Jeffrey Rose, whose patience with my intensity regarding this project was profound and another example of the calm, fortitude, and strength that he provides for all endeavors in my life. I appreciated most his willingness to listen, his reading and proofreading of drafts, and his patience; this was yet another venture in our wonderfully adventurous life. I also acknowledge and thank my daughter, Courtney Rose, who recently graduated (June 2009) with a Master’s Degree in Education from Harvard University. She not only understands the importance of cultural competence, but it was also an important aspect of her research while pursuing her degree because she feels it is extremely relevant to the field of education, and I agree. Hence, her thoughtfulness and intelligent conversation when I needed to explore ideas for inclusion in the textbook were quite helpful and insightful. I also thank my son, Brandon Rose, who recently graduated from Yale University (May 2009) with a Bachelor’s Degree in History and who began law school at the University of Florida in 2009. His words of encouragement were extremely helpful, even as he struggled through the intensity of writing his senior essay while I was writing this book. Again I found a kindred spirit endeavoring in a similar task of writing. I wholeheartedly thank my family because, as with all that I do, it is for my wonderful husband and our amazing children, who are now young adults; I pursued this task knowing how much they believe in me and I in them.

Lastly, and with the highest regard, I thank God, without whom nothing I achieve would be possible.
About the Author

Dr. Patti Rose acquired her Master’s Degree (MPH) in Health Services Administration from the Yale University School of Public Health followed by her Doctorate (EdD) in Health Education from Columbia University, Teachers College. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor for the University of Miami (UM) Africana and American Studies Programs for which she has developed new courses entitled Black Women in Medicine and Healing, Race and Healthcare in America, African Women in the Diaspora, and Contemporary Issues in America. Formerly, she served as CEO of Rose Consulting, Inc., followed by CEO of Plainfield Health Center in Plainfield, NJ. Prior to that she served as Vice President of Behavioral Health Services at Economic Opportunity Family Health Center (EOFHC), Inc., one of the largest community health centers in the nation, located in Miami, FL, and as a consultant for EOFHC. She has also held the title of Lecturer for the Yale University School of Public Health, Adjunct Professor for the UM Education Department and Executive MBA Program and for the Barry University Health Services Administration Program, Associate Professor at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, FL, and Assistant Professor at Florida International University in Miami, FL (graduate level public health programs). Her professional affiliations have included the American College of Health Care Executives, the American Public Health Association, the Black Executive Forum, and the National Association of Health Services Executives. She was inducted into the Public Health Service Honor Roll at the Yale University School of Public Health for her long-term commitment to public health service and was appointed by the US Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology to serve in the capacity of Examiner on the 2004 Board of Examiners of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Dr. Rose has been married for 24 years and is the mother of two young adults.