

Cultural Competency in Radiation Oncology



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Introduction

As the diversity of our population grows, we have an obligation to accelerate cultural competency in Radiation Oncology in order to offer optimal care and to avoid problematic scenarios. This poster will outline some key cultural differences to be aware of, and strategies to circumvent issues before they arise.

Caution: culture-based generalizations should not necessarily be applied to all individuals within a certain culture. Always use care and consideration before making assumptions

Communication & Time Orientation

- Beware of idioms as they are interpreted differently in different cultures. For example, having “cold feet”
- Be careful using Positive/Negative to explain test results to avoid confusion (to many, Positive = Good)
- Pay attention to non-verbal reactions as they can be interpreted differently within different cultures
- Ask ‘open-ended’ questions instead of yes/no questions. Some cultures will tend to always agree or answer ‘yes’ out of respect
- Understand that lack of eye contact means different things in different cultures. Avoid using gestures as they too can mean different things
- People from lower socioeconomic strata often have a present time orientation and may need additional teaching when it comes to preventative medicine

Pain

- Response to pain is very culturally driven. Some cultures value stoicism, some are more expressive. Therefore be careful not to assess level of pain based on patient’s expression of pain
- Be mindful that cultural factors may keep a patient from asking for pain meds
- Examine your own biases regarding pain and suggest alternative forms of pain medication when appropriate

Religion, Spirituality, Customs & Traditions

- Honor patients’ requests for same-sex providers whenever possible
- Provide clergy when requested
- Do best to respect patients’ beliefs, even if in conflict with your own.
- Allow privacy for prayer
- Be aware that different religions have different holy days (eg Friday for Muslims, Saturday for Jews, Sunday for Christians)
- Allow for informed choices when procedures conflict with religious beliefs
- Learn and respect meanings of symbols
- In some cultures decisions and care are made by family over individual. Ask patient if others should be consulted when making decisions. Ask who family spokesperson will be (in many cultures, will defer to males)

The 4C’s of Culture

- Use this mnemonic to help guide patient questioning and to uncover culture-based dynamics that might otherwise go unnoticed:
- **CALL:** What do you *call* your problem?
- **CAUSE:** What do you think *caused* your problem?
- **COPE:** How do you *cope* with your condition?
- **CONCERNS:** What are your *concerns* about the condition/treatment?

Improving Patient Adherence

- Make sure patients understand instructions by having them demonstrate and explain back to you. Explain the rationale for your instructions
- Try to assess in advance whether your instructions might conflict with patients’ beliefs, culture or way of life and adjust accordingly
- Do what you can to develop trust
- Be genuinely curious about other cultures. Ask questions. Don’t stereotype.

Making a Difference

- Train bilingual staff to serve as interpreters and post a list of who can help with specific languages
- Have signs and forms in multiple languages to reflect populations served
- Ask families to donate reading material in their languages for waiting room
- Offer more modest patient gowns to women
- Ask patients how well their cultural needs were met. Add a category regarding culturally competent care to patient satisfaction surveys
- Allow flexible scheduling in clinics to accommodate cultural requirements
- Educate staff on cultural competence. Provide “cheat sheets” for reference
- Provide on-site continuing education on cultural diversity issues
- Make cultural assessments part of intake form

Works Cited & Resources

- Galanti, Geri Ann. “Caring for Patients from Different Cultures”, Fifth Edition, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia
- Slavin Stuart, MD, Galanti, Geri-Ann, PhD and Kuo, Alice, MD: The 4 C’s of culture, a mnemonic for health care professionals
- “How to equip your staff with cultural ‘cheat sheets’”, Advisory Board, <https://www.advisory.com/research/hr-advancement-center/resources/2014/cultural-cheat-sheets>