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Cultural Competency: A National Health Concern

Provider Types Affected

This article is for informational purposes only and does not affect Medicare billing processes.

Background

The increasing diversity of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic composition of the U.S. challenges providers as they strive to deliver health care services. Cultural and language differences between patients and providers may generate miscommunication of critical health care information, a lack of compliance with prescribed treatment or medication, or other factors that negatively influence clinical situations and health outcomes. The existence of racial and ethnic disparities in health has been well documented by organizations such as the Institute of Medicine and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Cultural competency, or the ability of health care providers to work effectively with colleagues and patients in cross-cultural situations, is a vital component of professional competence. Culturally competent practice can offer a variety of benefits to health care providers and their organizations, including:

- Improved patient care and satisfaction
- Decreased malpractice risk
- Enhanced operational efficiency
- Increased compliance with State and Federal regulations
- Reduction in health disparities

Disclaimer

This article was prepared as a service to the public and is not intended to grant rights or impose obligations. This article may contain references or links to statutes, regulations, or other policy materials. The information provided is only intended to be a general summary. It is not intended to take the place of either the written law or regulations. We encourage readers to review the specific statutes, regulations and other interpretive materials for a full and accurate statement of their contents.

Highlights of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) Activities to Address Health Disparities:

To ensure that providers are prepared for the challenges they face to deliver the right care to every person every time, CMS's Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) are working with healthcare providers to become more effective and culturally aware of how they provide care to diverse populations. As part of a national initiative, QIOs are recruiting health providers to participate in a FREE online (web-based) program *A Family Physician's Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care* to ensure that Medicare providers are prepared to effectively serve the increasingly diverse patient population. QIOs have adopted the Guide as the "Program of Choice" for health care provider cultural competency education. The Guide is an innovative educational product designed to equip health care providers with the cultural and linguistic competencies required to improve the quality of care for minority, immigrant, and ethnically diverse communities.

A Family Physician's Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care is anchored in the three themes of the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care (CLAS) and serves a key initiative in helping the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health to achieve its mission of "improving the health of racial and ethnic minority populations' through the development of effective health policies and programs that help to eliminate disparities in health care."

A Family Physician's Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care is a case study based curriculum, featuring video vignettes and a diverse group of providers and clinic staff at a fictional practice setting that reinforce learning points throughout the modules. Participants can also share their reactions to the case studies in an online bulletin-board feature. This program was designed with the busy health care provider in mind, offering "anytime, anywhere" continuing education credit in an engaging and innovative format.

This curriculum is available to all health care providers at <http://www.thinkculturalhealth.org>. The program is accredited for Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits for physicians and Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for nurses and pharmacists.

Please visit <http://www.thinkculturalhealth.org> to access the free accredited continuing education program, *A Family Physician's Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care*, and to view updates about the nursing program.

Additional Information

To access the free program, *A Family Physician's Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care*, please visit <http://www.thinkculturalhealth.org>.

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The National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health Care are available at <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=15> on the Internet.

For more information about the QIO cultural competency initiative, please visit <http://www.qsource.org/uqiosc/> on the Internet.

Additional information about the Office of Minority Health is available at <http://www.omhrc.gov/> on the Internet.

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