Cultural diversity in Health Sciences

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# Introduction

Medicine is a homogenous field by nature. It is put in place to serve a truly diverse population which is a major problem in itself. This problem does not limit itself to the language barrier alone. It also encompasses culture and the beliefs this diverse population holds regarding the practice of medicine and their socioeconomic realities which affects their access to said medication. With the country in desperate need for healthcare reforms, it is rather important to redefine the term universal access, especially with regard to the demographic changes in the US in the past few decades. This change accounts for a significant change and the sort that needs to be addressed (Bouye, McCleary, & Williams, 2016). These changing demographics underscore the importance held of cultural diversity, especially with regard to a profession where the relationship between the patient and the provider is key towards determining the quality of care provided. It goes without saying that when a homogenous force of medical professionals is tasked with taking care of a diverse array of patients, the quality of care at hand can greatly suffer as a result. Health disparities have a huge impact on the provision of care to diverse populations. Here, the attitude held by medical professionals also matters a great deal, since certain cultures hold a very different perspective of clinical healthcare and respond to it with a different attitude. Thus, it is vital that a system is put into place where people seeking medical attention from the diverse cultural background. Furthermore, apart from the system, it is also important that they are aided by a healthcare provider that understands the nuances of such a culture and can relate to them on a personal level (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, & Owusu Ananeh-Firempong, 2016).

# Discussion

In terms of healthcare, a well-meant but culturally inappropriate means of intervention is more counterproductive than being productive in the desired manner. Here, a “one size fits all” model is rather impossible to be applicable, since it may possibly do more harm than good to the patient. Healthcare professionals need to enhance their sense of understanding with regard to how culture works, and how a said culture impacts the perspective of an individual. As mentioned, the culture an individual associates with has a deep effect on their view of the world and a healthcare professional would have a much better time getting through to a patient when they understand the patient’s culture. Thus, for a healthcare professional to become culturally competent, they not only need to understand but also appropriately respond to the unique combination of cultural variables at hand. Furthermore, the way these variables interact with one another is also a measure of the diverse dimensions that are associated with culturally diverse patients.

The Jamaican culture, usually, is not that hard to understand. It has its nuances and comprises of an inimitable combination of variables that make it stand out. However, it is not as complicated as most cultures around the globe. Cultures have a tendency to be dynamic. The Jamaican culture is made of a mix of ethnicities that migrated to the island in the past century (Minkov & Hofstede, 2013). All of these cultures have added to what we know as the Jamaican culture at present. These people have weathered enslavement, oppression and some of the worse traits of human behavior. However, they have persevered and came out stronger on the other side. Thus, one can aptly state that the Jamaican culture inspires pride among its people. The Taino were the original inhabitants of the region, who left behind a rich cultural history following colonial invasion (Atkinson, 2006).

The Jamaican culture is made up of an ethnically diverse society. Their culture is a mixture of a number of other cultures, and the various ethnic groups that have invaded the country overtime have only made this culture richer and more diverse. With regard to their religious affiliations, most of the population of the country identify with the Christian faith, with few even observing the Rastafarian belief system. Jamaicans have a complex family structure. The parental figures in the household hold autonomy with regard to the decision-making process, regardless of their age. This responsibility is taken seriously by the families and even extended family members are involved in the proper upbringing of children. The male and the female members have their own set of responsibilities cut out for them. The oldest male sibling is held responsible for the right choice regarding the mate selection and education of the younger members of the family, while the right to make such decisions regarding this person rests with the parental authorities. On the other hand, the female sibling is seen as the caregiver in the family. She is tasked with making the decisions regarding healthcare and wellbeing of family members (Brown & Johnson, 2008).

The Jamaican culture regards health issues and sickness as a punishment for God for sin or wrong-doing. When an individual in the family falls sick, it is a cause for shame and guilt among the members of the family. Furthermore, it is also believed that this punishment will pass on to the next generation. Thus, the Jamaican families prefer to treat illness as a family affair and choose to treat it with herbs, rituals, oils, and baths to anoint the body and purify it from evil and enhance the body’s ability to fight evil. The Jamaican culture firmly believes that supernatural forces are the reason behind good, sickness, evil and ill health. Furthermore, they also choose to self-medicate before seeking professional medical assistance on the matter.

The use of modern medicine is more prevalent in the upper class of society, while more Jamaicans prefer religious and holistic forms of treatment to deal with their issues. Over the counter prescriptions, drugs are mostly used to treat illness where holistic treatments aren’t as effective and modern medicine has proven to be more effective. This shows that while the Jamaican culture is protective of its past, at the same time it is open to a modern worldview. A number of people seek professional means of healthcare provided by government-run clinics and hospitals. Private clinics are also available, but they are most visited by the upper class of society or those that have insurance covering their healthcare costs (Mordecai & Mordecai, 2001). With the passage of time, more and more Jamaicans are turning to modern healthcare. However, traditional medicine and herbal remedies still remain a go-to source of healthcare.

The recent increase in the level of literacy around the country has attributed to the shift towards mainstream medical care. Most households today are becoming more and more thankful for the medical advancements and are open to access when needed. (Beuermann & Garzon, 2016). The efforts made by the government to reduce healthcare costs is also a contributive factor on the subject.

# Conclusion

The Jamaican culture is future-oriented. The number of people seeking mainstream healthcare is increasing and is set to further increase when people become more aware of the benefits of the healthcare system and how life-altering it can be. However, healthcare professionals need to concern themselves with becoming better acquainted to the culture at hand and ensure that the people making use of the present system are treated in a manner where there are open to obtaining mainstream healthcare. Thus, healthcare professionals need to become more culturally competent with time and learn to survive in a multicultural environment where they may be subjected to culturally diverse individuals. This cultural competency can be extremely helpful to a healthcare professional, given how diverse the population of the country is becoming with time. It enhances the level of understanding between the healthcare provider and the patients and makes it easier to form a relationship based on mutual trust. Here, cultural competency is capable of encompasses appropriate skills, personality orientation, along with sufficient cultural knowledge.

By embracing this cultural competence and diversity within the profession of mainstream healthcare, care providers will be better equipped with the provision of quality healthcare. It may not seem to have a huge impact at the moment, however, it is capable of improving the present healthcare system in a great way. By giving ethnically diverse individuals a healthcare professional that is one of them allows them to connect with the care professional at a different level and that makes all the difference (Jackson & Gracia, 2014).

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