

Executive Summary

The University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) created “Culture Clues,” a program designed to increase the awareness of the culture and preferences of diverse patients served by the medical center. The University of Washington Medical Center considers each patient unique and seeks to meet individual concerns and needs. Culture Clues are published by the medical center as a guide to provide high-quality patient care while respecting cultural backgrounds of the patients and their families. Culture Clues are distributed to staff in hard copy format, through the Internet (<http://depts.washington.edu/pfes/cultureclues.html>) and through computerized medical records. Medical center staff is introduced to Culture Clues during staff training and in-services.

Organization Size: 398 Beds

Program/Initiative

Culture Clues: The Culture Clues program was developed in response to a needs assessment conducted by University of Washington Medical Center staff, which was conducted by the Patient and Family Education Services Department. The staff indicated that cultural education was a key priority for them in ensuring that quality hospital care could be provided to patients of diverse cultures. Culture Clues provides the professional staff with written tips and indicators about cultural diversity to assist them in meeting the appropriate cultural needs of the medical center’s patients. The “clues” provide the opportunity to ask the patient appropriate questions to better understand their cultural preferences so the staff can treat each patient and their family according to their unique needs. The Patient and Family Education Services Department is currently compiling information about culture and end-of-life rituals to add to the curriculum.

Establishment of Program/Initiative: 1998

Racial or Ethnic Disparities Problem the Program/Initiative Was Designed to Address: UWMC staff perceived the need for a better understanding of diverse cultures served by the medical center’s patients.

Major Objectives

- Help patients make accurate and well-informed decisions about their health care
- Educate UWMC staff to ensure the competency, skills, and attitudes necessary to serve all patients

- Increase medical center staff awareness of personal preferences of patients from diverse cultures
- Help staff understand the patients' perception of illness, patterns of kinship, decision-making, and comfort with touch
- Provide clues and insights into cultural preferences at the point of patient care service
- Provide the staff with appropriate questions to ask patients to learn how to better understand unique family and patient preferences

Significant Results

- Increase in staff confidence to more effectively serve the unique needs of various ethnic groups
- Improved communications with minority patients

External Partners in the Program/Initiative: None at present time

Limitations or Problems Encountered: This is only a tool to better understand the cultural preferences of those served by the hospital. To date, the program coordinators have not encountered any significant problems. This program is only the beginning of an ongoing project.

Estimated Cost of the Program, To Date: approximately \$1,500- \$2,000 to produce a culture clue (staff time for research, development and review)

Advice to Other Organizations That May Want to Start a Similar Program

- Start by identifying staff needs through needs assessments
- Know which social and ethnic communities are prevalent within the hospital services area
- Contact representatives from community cultural groups and ask them to meet with program coordinators to review culture clues for accuracy
- Only one tool among many to educate staff about cultural diversity (Many different approaches are needed for a complete cultural understanding program.)

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