Educational support materials for ABIM’s Care for the Underserved Module

Question 2

The population of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, with minority groups projected to comprise approximately 50% of the population by 2050. Culturally competent care, defined as demonstrating behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable providers/organizations to work effectively cross-culturally, has emerged as one approach to address increasing diversity and documented disparities.¹

Early cultural competence education often emphasized cultural sensitivity and relied heavily on a categorical concepts placing patients into cultural groups and outlining their “characteristic” values, customs, and beliefs.² Although specific cultural knowledge can be helpful, applying this knowledge to all members of particular ethnic or racial groups may lead to stereotyping and oversimplification.³⁴ Knowing everything about all potential cultural influences relevant in medical encounters is not feasible. Furthermore, cultural groups are heterogeneous, with differing beliefs, practices, and levels of acculturation.⁵

Likewise, transferring care to a race concordant provider may be similarly impractical and may or may not be desirable for an individual patient. Demographic trends among physicians have not mirrored that of the population more broadly. Minority physicians currently are more likely to care for minority, indigent, and sicker patients, but are significantly underrepresented in the physician workforce.⁶ Research has shown greater patient satisfaction among race concordant relationships, however transferring patients to race concordant clinicians has not been studied.⁷⁸

A more practical approach is to explore and understand how each patient’s socio-cultural background affects his or her health beliefs and behaviors. Physicians should then individualize care that takes these issues into account.⁹

For further information, see the following:

3. van Ryn M, Burke J. The effect of patient race and socio-economic status on physicians’ perceptions of patients Social Science & Medicine, 2000; 50(6): 813-828
   Michelle van Ryn and Jane Burke

This educational support material was created by the Society of General Internal Medicine’s Disparities Task Force. For more information, visit www.sgim.org/go/disparities
Educational support materials for ABIM’s Care for the Underserved Module


This educational support material was created by the Society of General Internal Medicine’s Disparities Task Force. For more information, visit www.sgim.org/go/disparities