

## Cultural Diversity and Sensitivity

Cultural diversity addresses racial and ethnic differences between and within groups of individuals. Cultural diversity is defined as the belief systems of a variety of groups of individual patterns of behaviors, historically selected ideals and values, and symbols or icons which are significant to a population.

### ***Culture and language may influence:***

- \* health, healing and belief in wellness programs
- \* how illness, disease and their causes are perceived
- \* the behavior of patients and their attitude towards healthcare providers
- \* the delivery of services by the healthcare provider

The increasing population growth of racial and ethnic communities and linguistic groups, each with its own cultural traits and healthcare profiles, presents a challenge to healthcare delivery. The healthcare provider and the patient each bring their own learned patterns of language and culture to the healthcare experience, which must be transcended to achieve equal access and quality healthcare for all patient population groups.

It is important to understand that communication can be difficult in normal circumstances. Cultures, religion and educational level, not to mention fear and stress from illness, all affect your ability to communicate with your patient effectively.

Language barriers may compound the situation.

### ***As healthcare providers, we must be aware of how different cultural groups view and understand:***

- \* life processes
- \* health and illness
- \* maintaining wellness
- \* causes of illness

Concepts of illness and wellness vary by cultures, as does customary treatment modalities. Furthermore, intra-cultural diversity may influence the outcome of healthcare, meaning that individuals within a specific culture may not share or value the same principles.

The healthcare worker brings their personal cultural heritage and the culture of their educational philosophy to the healthcare setting. When the provider considers their culture, the patient's culture, as well as the culture of the healthcare setting, they can offer care with sensitivity. Cultural beliefs are as integral to the care of an individual as physical and psycho-social factors.