

6th European Pathology Congress

June 16-17, 2016 Alicante, Spain

Cultural competence for medical professionals: How an understanding of social class and race/ethnicity can benefit everyone

Carol Apt

South Carolina State University, USA

Culture is one of the most fundamental and important aspects of human life. In a heterogeneous society such as the United States, beliefs and behaviors can vary widely by such variables as gender, religion, social class and race/ethnicity among others. For medical professionals, cultural competence refers to the acquisition of a basic working knowledge of those aspects of a patient's culture that may impact the latter's attitudes and behaviors in regard to health and illness. Cultural competence can result of desirable outcomes such as increased patient satisfaction with and provider and/or with treatment, greater compliance with medical advice and fewer malpractice lawsuits. It can also encourage smoother and more effective communication between patient and provider which can, in turn, reduce the levels of anxiety and frustration that some providers feel when interacting with patients whose cultures are different. This presentation will focus on how the variables of social class and race/ethnicity can affect many aspects of the doctor/patient encounter for providers as well as for patients.

Biography

Carol Apt has received her PhD in Sociology from Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, MA in Sociology from Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts (USA) and BA in Sociology from Indiana University in Indianapolis, Indiana. She also has a Certificate of French studies from Ecole Lemania in Lausanne, Switzerland. She is currently a Professor of Sociology at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, where she has been for the last 15 years. During that time she has taught Medical Sociology, Human Sexuality, Cultural Anthropology, Social Problems and the Sociology of Genocide, among others. She is also a Member of the South Carolina Medical Association Bioethics Committee and the Ethics Committee of The Regional Medical Centre in Orangeburg, South Carolina. In addition, she is the host of a live, call-in radio talk show called "Talk to Me," which is broadcast on 90.3 FM-WSSB, also in Orangeburg. During her show she addresses listeners' questions about sexuality and relationships.

capt@scsu.edu

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