



Evaluation FastFacts

from the Evaluation Center@HSRI



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This is one in a series of briefings on new and current mental health services evaluations, resources, and methods. We hope FastFacts will be a quick and easy way for you to learn important information in the field of evaluation. If you have any ideas on how FastFacts could be more useful to you, please contact Dow Wieman, Ph.D. at 617-876-0426 x2503 or dwieman@hsri.org.

Providing & Evaluating Culturally Competent Care is a Growing Concern

Providing culturally competent services to members of diverse populations is a growing concern among consumers and their families, health care professionals, administrators and researchers. Cultural competence has been defined as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables this system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross et al 1989). Other definitions exist, of course, but most seem to incorporate the ideals of professional responsibility, institutionalized cultural awareness, and culturally appropriate interactions with consumers.

This FastFacts is concerned with the conceptualization and delivery of culturally competent mental health services. The existing approaches to the delivery of culturally competent services stress varying aspects of care, such as provider knowledge of the

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The Evaluation Center@HSRI

is a technical assistance center funded by the federal Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and operated by the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI). The mission of the Center is to provide evaluation technical assistance to state and non-profit and private entities including, but not limited to, consumers, families and provider groups. The Center presently has six programs designed to fulfill this mission—

- Conferences & Training
- Consultation Program
- Knowledge Assessment & Application
- Multicultural Issues in Evaluation Program
- Toolkit & Evaluation Materials
- Topical Evaluation Networks & Web

For more information on the Center, please visit our website at:

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consumer's culture, the use of translated instruments and culturally-related normative data, and the participation of agencies in culturally-related community activities. It is hypothesized that aspects of the process of care such as these influence mental health services utilization and outcomes. The two aspects of culturally competent care addressed here are the measurement of consumer identity and use of culturally appropriate diagnosis, assessment and treatment.

Measuring Identity

The gathering of knowledge about a consumer's identity is a crucial step in providing culturally-competent care. It is important that the type of information gathered about race, culture or ethnicity be more inclusive than simply allowing consumers to choose from a list of limited, pre-determined categories, such as those used for the U.S. Census. The consumer should be allowed not only to self-determine his or her identity, but should also be encouraged to elaborate on the meaning he or she ascribes to this identity. Health care providers should be aware that identity is not static. An individual's conception of his or her identity may be modified through time or as the result of changes in his or her life. For example, a person who immigrates to the U.S. may begin to identify more strongly with his or her nationality or ethnicity as a result of being immersed within a culture radically different from his or her own. The importance of an accurate determination of consumer identity cannot be overemphasized. It will provide the context for the creation of a culturally competent plan of service for the individual.

Interrelated with a self-asserted cultural identity is the importance of enabling consumers to identify the traits they consider essential in a service provider and treatment program. Simply matching

consumers with providers who share certain demographic variables without inquiring which traits the consumer would prefer in a provider fails to take into account the diversity inherent in individual cultural identity. For example, matching a Native American consumer with a Native American provider may not be most helpful to the consumer if he or she most identifies with being a veteran and a Wabanaki, and he or she is matched with a provider who is not a veteran and is an Iroquois.

Culturally Appropriate Diagnosis, Assessment and Treatment

Once a consumer's cultural/racial/ethnic identity has been specified and the importance the consumer places on various aspects of his or her identity has been established, a context for appropriate treatment is in place. Work with this consumer must then build upon a knowledge and understanding of the particular cultural group with which he or she identifies. This understanding should enable service providers to diagnose, assess and treat the consumer in a manner that is culturally appropriate.

Knowledge of appropriate ways of assessing and treating consumers of a particular cultural group comes from several methods of inquiry. Health care providers must familiarize themselves with the history and perspectives of particular cultural groups through historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological and literary texts, as well as informants. The history of a particular group's experience in the United States is an important area of inquiry, as are the ways that factors such as religion, family, age, and disability affect the perceptions, behaviors and expectations of members of various communities.

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competent care. It is important that the type of information gathered about race, culture or ethnicity be more inclusive than simply allowing consumers to choose from a list of limited, pre-determined categories, such as those used for the U.S. Census. The consumer should be allowed not only to self-determine his or her identity, but should also be encouraged to elaborate on the meaning he or she ascribes to this identity. Health care providers should be aware that identity is not static. An individual's conception of his or her identity may be modified through time or as the result of changes in his or her life. For example, a person who immigrates to the U.S. may begin to identify more strongly with his or her nationality or ethnicity as a result of being immersed within a culture radically different from his or her own. The importance of an accurate determination of consumer identity cannot be overemphasized. It will provide the context for the creation of a culturally competent plan of service for the individual.

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The Evaluation Center@HSRI offers several products dealing with issues of cultural competence. These include:

- **Culture, Race and Ethnicity in Performance Measurement:** A Compendium of Resources
- Notes on a Roundtable on Conceptualizing and Measuring Cultural Competence

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- **Ecocultural Research:** A Mental Health Researcher's Guide to the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Culture.

Resources

Jackson, V.H. and Lopez, L., Eds. (1999). **Cultural Competency in Managed Behavioral Health-care**. Providence, Rhode Island: Manisses Communications Group, Inc. To order, call 1-800-333-7771.

Multicultural Mental Health Evaluation Network (Listserv). The purpose of this network is to foster discussion of issues related to the evaluation of mental health services for racial and ethnic minorities. Subscribe to the network.

National Center for Cultural Competence. Georgetown University Child Development Center, Center for Child Health and Mental Health Policy. 3307 M Street N.W., Suite 401, Washington, D.C. 20007-3935. 1-800-788-2066 or 202-687-5387. Fax: 202-687-8899. E-mail: cultural@gunet.georgetown.edu The NCCC provides technical assistance, consultation, training and materials pertaining to cultural competence in service delivery for children with special health needs and their families.

References

Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K. & Isaacs, M. (1989). **Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care, Vol. I.** Washington, D.C.: CASSP Technical Assistance Center, Georgetown University Child Development Center.

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