

Cultural & Religious Considerations in End-of-Life Care & the Donation Decision

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“Unspoken assumptions regarding meaning of health, illness, and death may affect communication regarding donation.” (Dr. Hawryluck & Knickle, n.d.)

In order to avoid cultural assumptions when working with a grieving potential donor family, it is important to understand some basic definitions and learn how to communicate with and become a student of the family. These principles are applicable to any cultural interaction in healthcare.

Definitions:

Culture – “Culture is defined as a specific set of social, shared, educational, religious and professional behaviors, practices and values that individuals learn and ascribe to while participating in or outside of groups with whom they typically interact.” (Bomar, 2004)

Ethnicity – “...is a key facet of culture and refers to a common ancestry, a sense of ‘peoplehood’ and group identity. From a common ancestry and a shared social and cultural history and national origin have evolved shared values and customs.” (Friedman et al., 2003)

Race – “...is an ancient, non-scientific, political classification of human beings and is based on physiological characteristics, such as skin color, eye shape, and texture of hair.” (Bomar, 2004)



“Cultural competence is a journey, not a destination.”

(Galanti, 2008)

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Ask Questions & Learn:

To learn the family/patient’s values ask questions by applying Arthur Kleinman’s Explanatory Model:

- 1) What do you call your illness?
What name does it have?
- 2) What do you think has caused the illness?
- 3) Why and when did it start?
- 4) What do you think the illness does?
How does it work?
- 5) How severe is it? How long do you think you will have it?
- 6) What kind of treatment do you think the patient should receive? What are the most important results you hope he/she receives from this treatment?
- 7) What are the chief problems the illness has caused?
- 8) What do you fear most about the illness?

Basic Tips:

- Do not stereotype
- Know yourself / your own culture & how it evolved
- Minimize hand gestures
- Identify the cultural decision-maker
- Meet basic needs
- Do not project your own feelings
- Keep your motives in check and don’t project
- Learn a few phrases or greeting in their language
- Ask questions & Never assume

(Place OPO contact instructions here)