Promoting Health Equity: Culturally Competent Health Care

Task Force Finding

Intervention Definition
An important factor hindering a more beneficial relationship between a growing ethnically diverse U.S. population and our healthcare systems is the lack of both culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services. Ethnic disparities in health outcomes can result from differential access to services because of direct or indirect discrimination, diagnostic errors resulting from misunderstanding of language, and failure to attend to culturally based health beliefs and practices.

Culturally competent healthcare systems are intended to remove the barriers to access caused by discrimination as well as differences in language and culturally based health practices, and ultimately to decrease ethnic disparities in health status. The Task Force examined five relevant interventions: programs to recruit and retain staff who reflect the cultural diversity of the community served, use of interpreter services or bilingual providers for clients with limited English proficiency, cultural competency training for healthcare providers, use of linguistically and culturally appropriate health education materials, and culturally-specific healthcare settings.

Task Force Finding (October 2001)*
Evidence was insufficient to determine the effectiveness of any of these interventions to reduce ethnic differentials in treatment and utilization, improve satisfaction with care, or improve health status outcomes. Of particular note was the lack of comparison or control groups against which to compare culturally competent interventions with interventions less informed by the language or culture of the client population.

*From the following publication:

Publications


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