

# Cultural Competence at the End of Life

*Dying and grief are uniquely personal, yet these experiences and feelings cannot be separated from who we are or from the cultures that inform the development of our values and beliefs*

Cultural diversity in relation to dying, death and grief will manifest itself on the basis of family/social background, gender, age, race/ethnicity, and religion or spirituality

Cultural competence involves:	How to develop cultural competence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developing self-awareness</li><li>• Treating each encounter as a cross-cultural experience</li><li>• Developing the ability to recognize and challenge personal beliefs and assumptions</li><li>• Respecting values and beliefs which differ from one's own</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read books, view documentaries</li><li>• Talk to a colleague from a different background</li><li>• Attend trainings, workshops</li><li>• Ask patients and families how to address their cultural needs</li><li>• Be curious</li></ul>

## Culturally Competent Skills...

- develop an understanding of the patient / family's perception of the illness.
- develop a relationship of trust between patient and health care providers that encourages open communication.
- assess the patient / family's understanding of the plan of care and decisions they must make.

## Communication and Decision-making

- Assess the language used to discuss the patient's illness
- Use qualified Interpreters for important conversations between the patient / family and healthcare providers
- Determine whether decisions are made by the patient, a family member, or the family as a whole

## Rituals and Practices Before, During and After Death

- Hospital Chaplains can assist with prayer and ritual preparations, or can involve appropriate community religious or spiritual leaders to meet the family's needs
- Ask patients / families in advance what traditions and practices will be meaningful to them; contact a hospital Chaplain for support & guidance
- Determine the appropriate care of the body after death, and whether family members wish to help with this care and preparation

## Grief

- Emotional responses of grief are culturally influenced - be prepared for a range of expressions and behaviors.
- Find a quiet space for family to be together. Provide enough chairs, tissue, water, etc. Phone access may be helpful.

## Resources

Irish DP, Lundquist KF, Nelsen VJ., *Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death and Grief: Diversity in universality*, Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis; 1993.

Matlins & Magida (Eds.). *How to be a Perfect Stranger: The essential religious etiquette handbook*, Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006.

<http://www.growthhouse.org/diverse.html> - click on "cross-cultural issues in death and dying"

[www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/self.htm](http://www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/self.htm)

[www.medlineplus.gov/spanish](http://www.medlineplus.gov/spanish)