



■ Book Review ■

Reflections from Common Ground: Cultural Awareness in Healthcare

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Amy M. Kwon

Hanyang University, South Korea

Finding identity may be the ultimate objective in life. This book, *Reflections from Common Ground: Cultural Awareness in Healthcare*, gently guides you to be aware of your cultural values. Especially if you are in a healthcare-related occupations and you interact with an increasing number of people coming from diverse environments around the world, this book provides insight into our daily lives.

This book consists of 23 short chapters, starting with “The Journey” as the first chapter. As the title indicates, the first chapter introduces the book’s itinerary to readers. Setting aside time at the beginning of any event, it asks you to get things in order, so you will be ready to read the next chapter.

Chapters 2 and 3 emphasize diverse nationalities and their corresponding histories. Like an old story being recounted from a grandmother, these chapters lightly touch on the times of King Henry VIII and the conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, which finally led to a desire of freedom from the England and subsequent migration to America. At the same time, on the other side of the world, from Asia to Latin America, similar linguistic and religious situations were continued, and the resulting famine played a key role in all of these changes and the revolution of these times. The author does not stop narrating the history and warns us that history has a way of repeating itself. That is, we must recognize that injustice may occur around us, and awareness of such injustice is

the start of the cultural competence.

These historical events can cause individual bias, and people may be dominated by prejudice and discrimination, which results in disparity in care. Thus, chapter 4 offers some suggestions to overcome our own biases by becoming aware of them.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe external obstacles affecting healthcare outcomes such as cancer, obesity, AIDS, and mortality. They point out social barriers that hinder access to healthcare. The author focuses on the importance of education for communication as one key barrier, noting that 50% of African American and Latino adolescents drop out of schools prior to graduation and 14 million people are not proficient in English in America. In particular, if you are in the healthcare industry, it advises you to become a bridge between healthcare and people in need by providing such people with valuable information.

A description of culture care theory by Dr. Leininger follows in chapter 7. Culture care theory aims to find the common and diverse aspects of cultural groups and incorporate those aspects into a culturally competent and sensitive plan of care. In short, “culturally congruent care is beneficial,” but practicing it may be challenging due to a lack of time to get to know the clients. Thus, the chapter advises you to ask the patients about their healthcare methods. Using chapter 7 as a foundation, chapter 8 continues the theme, showing cultural competence as an ongoing process. Cultural competence can be acquired with each encounter and discussion, and quality care, including psychosocial components, can be conducted by putting that cultural knowledge into practice.

Various types of healing and treatment methods are introduced in chapters 9 and 10. In this part, the author explores ancient healing methods and contrasts them with modern medicine, emphasizing that there are many ways to heal. What is important is practicing care according to a patient’s plan of care and suggesting some communication strategies, using an example of childbearing practices in Mexico.

In chapter 11, the focus moves to America, covering minorities. When recruiting foreign healthcare professionals, the author suggests you

avoid conflict and show respect. It further gives a short note about Filipino cultural values in chapter 11 and shows orthodox Jewish cultural values and beliefs in chapter 12. Chapter 13 introduces Bosnia's refugees, and explains how long it takes for them to adjust to resettlement in a new environment according to the seven stages of adjustment. The author then cautions the reader not to stereotype refugees by speaking down to them. The next topic is native Americans, introducing various kinship structures. Chapter 14 explores how family and tribal associations are highly valued in this population and asks for healthcare professionals to recognize differences in communication. Chapters 15 and 16 cover the associations between religion and health practices. According to statistics, African Americans are at higher risks of developing chronic or urgent healthcare issues, such as cancer, heart disease, and even trouble in childbirth, and dying from them. One interesting note is that the author mentions objectively that relentless exposure to racism over many months and years could cause the body to produce higher levels of cortisol, leading to high blood pressure and glucose levels, which can lower the immune system and accelerate the aging process. Based on these ideas, these chapters emphasize the roles of economics and education in resolving disparities in accessing the healthcare system. Chapter 17 extends the issues of cultural beliefs, introducing the situation of Vietnamese people and how their pain expressions may be different, according to their culture; it once again addresses the importance of cultural awareness. Chapter 18 explains gender roles in Islam. In the late 1800s, emigrants from the Middle East began to come to the US, originally to seek economic opportunities. Following the relaxation of immigration laws in 1965, a significant number of people settled in the US. For that reason, it has become important to be aware of this population and to understand their culture in order to avoid conflicts. An Arab-Muslim's unique perspective on life and religion must be incorporated into care plans through an understanding of the hierarchal structure defined by gender roles. As another hierarchal structure, chapter 19 introduces the Chinese population. As with the Mexican traditions, the past is still present in the Chinese culture.

Family, including extended family, is important in China, and the most important values are harmony and balance. Respect and honor for the elderly and those in authority provides harmony through a hierarchal structure, and loyalty provides supports in times of crisis or illness. Chinese medicine embraces the same concept of harmony, and this concept is exemplified by treatment by a Chinese herbalist. The author recommends that healthcare professionals think of ways to incorporate their religion and spiritual practices into their care plans. For the remaining part of the world, Chapter 20 recounts an episode of Cindy, an Anglo American with an Anglo-American history. Individualism, competition, and achievement are key values in this culture. The author again emphasizes that “develop[ing] a plan of care that considers the health issues in combination with the patients’ cultural beliefs and values requires that we find ways to build a foundation based on those concepts.”

Passing through these episodes, the author defines successful care plans in the healthcare field. In chapter 21, she clearly says that success can only be created through agreements in care plans between healthcare professionals and patients. To reach such an agreement, in chapter 21, the author gently guides the reader regarding how to simplify consent forms and develop them with the patient’s language in mind, considering cultural perspectives. She then leads the readers to think about who the decision maker is for a smooth patient admission process. As quality care is beneficial to the patient and family, the author addresses the idea that culturally competent and quality care needs to be guaranteed in all procedures.

Last but not least, the book suggests multiple approaches for healthcare professionals. In particular, healthcare organizations and health occupation faculty are the primary audience for chapters 22 and 23. The book asks health organizations to ensure that they hire culturally competent staff who meet the criteria for Joint Accreditation Commission of Health Care Organizations (JACHO), Magnet Status Recognition, or the office of Minority Health’s Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Standards, all of which are renowned as culturally and linguistically appropriate

standards. Additionally, the author also asks members of health occupation faculties to meet accreditation requirements and gain cultural awareness and competence. If both faculty and staff are willing to participate in the review of the subject matter, the programs for care plans must be effective; however, the book also closed with the idea that the program should be evaluated regularly and revised as needed.

Reflections from Common Ground is a resource for those who participate in or lead healthcare organizations. For individuals, the author says that we must engage in self-discovery, including examining our values, beliefs, and practices. She then asks you to open your eyes to see the world through other people's perspectives. You may at first find differences, but you may also be open to common ground. Participating in this cycle enables you to develop trusting and respectful relationships.

This book has the power to reflect back on time. It is possible to spend time complaining about differences one encounters. This is such a shame! How do you feel about that?

Biographical Note

Amy M. Kwon (Ph.D.) is an assistant research professor of Hanyang University in Seoul. As one area of expertise, she has published extensively on the principles and practices of bio-medical statistics and public health. Email: amykwon@hanyang.ac.kr
