

# Preface

Modern medicine is making remarkable advances associated with breakthroughs in medical technology and rapidly accumulating biomedical knowledge. However, it is a commonly shared concern that, in becoming more technically oriented, the practice of medicine—with a sometimes excessive focus on the body while ignoring mind and emotion—struggles to maintain a human face. There is a strong need to correct this skewed tendency and to practice medicine that emphasizes the integration of mind and body—to see and care for the patient as a whole person—a spirit endorsed by the contemporary field of psychosomatic medicine. As an extension of this, there is an urgent need to provide culturally competent care for patients—that is, care that is concerned about cultural issues—and tailors interactions and interventions in ways that appropriately takes culture into account. Societies around the world, including ours, are becoming multiethnic and polycultural. The reality of medical care is that we treat people of diverse backgrounds with varying customs and beliefs.

Inequalities of care among minorities and the culturally different are being increasingly documented. As a result, the Surgeon General of The United States has recently urged that medical care become increasingly culturally competent. A major goal in solving this problem is the inclusion of a cultural focus in medical education. A rapidly increasing number of training programs are requiring that cultural competence training be included in their curricula. Despite this, books addressing this topic are few. This book, *Culture Competence in Health Care: A Guide for Professionals*, is intended to fill this void for students of medicine, nursing, social work, clinical psychology, and other healthcare disciplines. It is designed to be helpful for practicing physicians and health practitioners, in general. Objectives of this book include providing critical knowledge about cultural issues in healthcare, approaches to obtaining necessary cultural knowledge in specific situations, and enhancing cultural sensitivity by stressing the cultural implications of various interactions and situations in healthcare settings.

This book is written as a joint collaboration of two authors—one (Tseng) specializes in cultural psychiatry and the other (Streltzer) specializes in consultation-liaison psychiatry. By combining our experience and expertise in these two areas, we have developed and organized a new body of knowledge into this book addressing the issue of the cultural aspects of healthcare. We have worked together to publish

several books in the past, including: *Culture and Psychopathology* (Bruner/Mazel, 1997), *Culture and Psychotherapy* (American Psychiatric Press, 2001), and *Cultural Competence in Clinical Psychiatry* (American Psychiatric Publishing Inc., 2004). This book is a continuation of our collaboration—a further stage in our work on culture and clinical care.

The book consists of nine chapters, covering culture and healthcare from several perspectives. It provides an overview of the concept of culture, and it discusses key issues in various medical and healthcare specialties. The book reveals the way culture influences interactions with patients, including how to use interpreters to overcome language barriers. A chapter is devoted to cultural issues in working with patients of selected ethnicities. The book covers special medical issues and certain medical diseases. Cultural influences on mental disorders are reviewed. The final chapter summarizes the main themes addressed in the book with specific suggestions for providing culturally competent health care for patients in general.

We have attempted to strike a balance in the subject matter between clinical application and theoretical elaboration. In many chapters, case vignettes are inserted to illustrate the issues elaborated in the text. Most of them are based on actual cases encountered by the authors or contributed by colleagues. Appropriate modifications have been made in the consideration of confidentiality. The material of the book has been derived primarily, but not entirely, from research and experiences in the United States, but the basic principles will apply to medical practice in a variety of cultural settings that are applicable to healthcare professionals around the world as well.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-0-387-72170-5>

Cultural Competence in Health Care

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2008, XI, 138 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-72170-5