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Cultural competence is a “hot topic” for physicians as the diversity of our patient population increases. The general meaning of culturally competent care is to deliver health care that is sensitive to health beliefs, behaviors, epidemiology and treatment efficacy in different population groups or cultures. What is a culture? A set of shared knowledge, beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior and language among a given population, a culture can be defined by country of origin, education, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, socioeconomic status etc. We all have multiple cultures that we belong to....some we share with our patients and many that differ from our patients’ cultures. In the series of articles that will be part of the Pulse’s President’s column during the next year, the evaluation and treatment of the diverse cultures represented by Jefferson County patients will be discussed. I invite those of you with knowledge and interest in sharing your “pearls” for the care of patients representing different cultures to contribute to this column as well.

Cultural competence is important for several reasons: it eases health care delivery; it improves patient adherence to your recommendations; and it minimizes confusing communication. We’ve all heard of the Golden Rule: treat others the way we would want to be treated. Culturally competent care involves the “platinum rule”: treat others the way they want to be treated. This implies that we have knowledge or obtain the knowledge of the treatment preferences from the patient.

The population of medical health care providers is not demographically similar to the population of its cared for patients. Although there is some diversity among our physician population, we are mostly white, always well-educated and greater than 70 % male. According to the 2006 estimate, we have over 650,000 Jefferson County residents - 56 % white, 41 % Black, 3% Hispanic/Latino and 2% Asian, with 5 % speaking a language other than English in their home. Fifty-four percent of Jefferson County residents are female and 21% of all Jefferson County residents over age 5 report a disability. Birmingham is ranked 6th among cities in the United States with the fastest growing Latino population. Eighty percent of Latino immigrants do not have a regular healthcare provider and there are definite health care disparities with poorer health outcomes among all minority group members for morbidity and mortality related to cancer, heart disease, and pregnancy outcome.

There are some general principles that should be addressed in providing culturally competent care:

• Awareness of self and one’s own values: How do I react when a patient doesn’t speak English?
What are my beliefs about folk medicines?
• An understanding of culture and its role in health, disease and healing practices.
• A sensitivity to cultural issues for each patient that would mean inquiring about native language, influence of religion, family relationships, health practices, and illness beliefs.
• Try to discover a set of beliefs about health and illness by directly asking the patient: What do you think is the reason for your symptoms? What do your friends and family say about your symptoms? Do you know anyone else with this kind of a problem? What have you tried for this problem? Do you think these symptoms can be prevented in the future? How?

For those patients who are not able to speak English, it is important to use an interpreter. Ideally, this individual should NOT be a family member and definitely should not be a minor child of the patient. Federal law requires that any clinic or hospital that receives Medicare and Medicaid funds must provide interpreter services for non-English speaking patients. When using an interpreter, it is important to speak directly to the patient, not to the interpreter. Speak slowly and stop frequently to allow the interpreter to translate your words exactly. Avoid jargon and slang. Please make sure that the interpreter understands that you want your words transmitted fully and accurately as well as that you want to hear the entirety of the patient’s responses to your questions. Watch the patient’s body language to see if it fits with the information that you want transmitted. Please be patient and review the patient’s understanding of your instructions.

During the next several months, this column will review some culture-based perceptions of health, disease and healing practices. Please consider submitting some questions or scenarios for discussion or comment. Have you faced some issues in your practice that may be instructive for your fellow physicians? Do you have some suggestions? Please feel free to e-mail me at knelson@uab.edu or Martha Wise at mwise@jcmsalabama.org. I look forward to hearing from you.
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Upcoming Events

April 8  MASA Sixth District Caucus Meeting - 5:30 p.m. Social 6:00 p.m. Meeting

April 15  The Wayne Finley 811 Breakfast Club Meeting – Thomas A. S. Wilson, M.D., will speak on the Wilson Family of Physicians at 8:30 a.m. in the JCMS Board Room

April 17  Urology Coding Class

April 21  Executive Committee Meeting – 5:30 pm

May 3  JCMS Family Night at the Barons Game – 7:05 p.m.

May 19  Executive Committee Meeting – 5:30 pm

May 20  The Wayne Finley 811 Breakfast Club Meeting – Richard O. Russell, M.D., will speak on the History of Cardiology in the Area at 8:30 a.m. in the JCMS Board Room

May 22-25  MASA Annual Session - Sandestin

June 16  Foundation Trust Meeting – 5:00 pm

Executive Committee Meeting – 5:30 pm

July 21  Executive Committee Meeting – 5:30 pm

Contact Juanita Pruitt at 933-8601 for more information regarding any of the above events.

In Memoriam

The JCMS wants to acknowledge the recent passing of the following JCMS members:

Bruce K. Johnson, M.D.
February 10, 2008

John Michael Grelier, M.D.
February 23, 2008

Gene Thomas Qualls, M.D.
March 9, 2008

ERRATA

Last month’s cover article by Dr. Anthony M. Turkiewicz indicated that his last name is spelled “Turkiewiez.” Please notice the corrected spelling above. We apologize for the error.
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CLASSIFIEDS
Physicians – cardiologist, ophthalmologist and psychiatrist needed: The Alabama Disability Determination Service (DDS) invites letters of interest from physicians with these specialties. An Alabama Medical License is required. The DDS is committed to maintaining a diverse workforce; and therefore, we encourage minority applicants. The part-time work involves reviewing disability claims in the Birmingham office. There is no patient contact. If interested, please contact Pearline Talley, Medical Staff Supervisor, DDS, P.O. Box 830300, Birmingham, AL 35283-0300. Phone: (205) 989-2234.

MEMBER DISCOUNT!
The Jefferson County Medical Foundation Trust has entered into an agreement with ChartCapture whereby JCMS members will receive an 8% discount off the standard sales price of the ChartCapture system. The discount applies to the base system as well as the provider licenses and remote scanning units. The ChartCapture system is a great way to convert from paper to digital images and can coordinate with your practice’s electronic medical record system. Even if you do not yet have an EMR system, ChartCapture will allow you to save your patient files digitally and allow you to access them via computer or the internet. Check out the short demonstration video at www.chartcapture.com to see the system in action or call 866-558-8098 for more information. Make sure to identify yourself as a member of the JCMS in order to receive your discount!! See ad on page 3

Save on Office Supply Costs!
As you may have read in previous issues, last year the JCMS and Office Depot® entered into a Special Purchasing Program relationship. Through that arrangement, the offices of many members (as well as the JCMS office) have received discounted prices on office supplies. Special pricing is available to JCMS members on office supplies, toners and business machines. In addition, Office Depot® will create a core list of your practice’s most frequently ordered items and offer them at an even greater savings. The supplies are delivered to your office the following day free of charge. If you are not already taking advantage of this program, we urge you to do so. Just log on to the internet and register at: https://www.odams.net/registrations/jcms_welcome.php

If you have signed up and would like to find out how you can get even greater savings than you are currently receiving, email our account manager, Theresa Tuck, at theresa.tuck@officedepot.com or call her at 205-837-0439. Theresa can also give quotes on your printing needs and promotional product needs.
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JCMS INSTALLS NEW OFFICERS, DIRECTORS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Vice-President Robert A. Levine, Secretary-Treasurer F. Darlene Traffanstedt, President-Elect Christopher W. Old, and Past President David S. McKee

New Members of the Board of Directors Stephen R. Steinmetz, C. Calvert Dodson, and Matthew T. Smith with Past President David S. McKee

Board of Directors and Jefferson County Board of Health Member Laura Kezar is sworn in by Past President David S. McKee

New Ethics Committee Members, Mark A. Parker and Marc E. Bloomston

Incoming President Kathleen G. Nelson and Past President David S. McKee

CALL NOW FOR PASSES!!!!

On Saturday, May 3, 2008 the JCMS is hosting its Second Annual JCMS Family Night at the Barons. The Barons will be taking on the Mobile Bay Bears in a 7:05 p.m. game. There will also be a special Saturday Night Fireworks Spectacular that evening following the game (it’s also Boy Scout night for those who have Boy Scouts!) Family passes, each of which will admit a family of five, are available to members through the JCMS office. We are taking reservations now so please e-mail Martha at mwise@jcmsalabama.org or call 933-8601 to reserve your pass!