

What Are the Distinctive Cultural Elements Inherent in Canadian Family Practice?

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BACKGROUND

- Culture is powerful because it is present at all levels of society, organizations, and individuals.
- Cultural norms permeate health care delivery, yet they may be difficult to identify.
- An awareness of cultural norms in Canadian family practice is important for enhancing the quality of care provided by culturally diverse health professionals to culturally diverse patient populations.

PURPOSE

- To identify the prevailing socio-medico-cultural elements (values, behaviours, norms) inherent in family practice in Canada.

METHODS

DESIGN: Qualitative study employing focus groups.

SETTING: Academic family practices associated with the Department of Family Medicine, University of Alberta.

PARTICIPANTS: 7 academic family physicians/ community preceptors and 12 health professionals working within the family practice setting took part in the study (total participants = 19).

FOCUS GROUPS:

- 3 focus groups with family physicians and 3 focus groups with health professionals were conducted.
- Each focus group was led by a facilitator.
- Focus group data were audiotaped and transcribed.
- Participants were asked to identify the distinctive cultural elements operating within the context of Canadian family practice.

DATA ANALYSIS: Focus group data were analyzed descriptively and individually by four study investigators and agreement was reached during several group meetings.

ETHICS: Ethics approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Board (Health Panel), University of Alberta.

RESULTS

Within Canadian family practice, socio-medico-cultural elements were identified at four levels:

- Canadian society
 - Health system
 - Health professional
 - Patient level

Canadian Society

- Canada embraces and values multiculturalism.
- Life is valued
- Equality of persons, gender, race, religion, etc.
- Tolerance for differences is expected
- Strong work ethic prevails
- Time consciousness is valued
- Freedoms

Health System

- Publicly funded health system
- Equality of access
- Focus on primary care
- Emphasis on cleanliness/hygiene
- Technology focus

Health Professionals

- Professional ethics emphasize honesty, patient confidentiality and privacy
- Professional accountability is expected
- High standards prevail for maintaining professional boundaries between the doctor/health professional and patient
- Health professionals are expected to be knowledgeable and competent
- Family practice is patient-centered
- Relationship between the patient and doctor/health professional is less formal and more collaborative, rather than hierarchical
- Professionals are expected to be open to feedback

Patients

- Patients have a voice
- Patients have a choice
- Patients have high expectations and a sense of entitlement
- Patients are knowledgeable consumers of health care
- Patients expect to be understood and want to be listened to
- Patients are treated as individuals, rather than as members of a group



CONCLUSIONS

- Inherent in Canadian family practice are distinctive cultural elements that operate at the level of society, the health system, the health professional, and the patient.
- An orientation to cultural elements inherent within the Canadian medical context should be included in the training of all health professionals.