



THE CULTURALLY SENSITIVE INTERVIEW²

The Culturally-sensitive Interview: Despite similarities among patients from a specific ethnic group, each patient must be seen as an individual who may or may not adhere to a particular set of beliefs and practices. It is important to ask specifically about health beliefs. One way to begin such exploration may include opening a discussion by saying:

"I know that patients and providers (nurses/social workers/health educators) sometimes have different ideas about diseases and how they affect you. So, it's important in treating a disease to get clear on how both the doctor and the patient think about it. That's why I'd like to know more about your ideas on HIV. That way I can know what your concerns are, and we can work together in treating your illness."

Expect culturally-specific beliefs in the following areas. To facilitate the interview process, a number of questions are suggested for each area.

a. Causes of illness/disease

"What do you know about HIV?"

"How do you think HIV affects your body? How does the disease work?"

"What can you do to prevent the infection from spreading?"

b. Death and dying

"What did your doctor tell you about what will happen to you?"

"What do you think will happen to you?"

"What do you believe happens when someone dies?"

"What are the signs that death is near?"

"Does death have a purpose or symbolic meaning?"

"What are the responsibilities of the living when someone close to them is dying?"

"What needs to be done once someone dies?"

"How is death in the hospital viewed?"

"What do you want done with your body after you die?"

"What ceremonies or rituals would you find comforting?"

c. Sexuality/homosexuality

"Is it acceptable in your family or in your community for men to have sex with other men?"

"How do people in your community react when someone has a same-sex partner?"

² From: Training for Cultural Competence in the HIV Epidemic; Lana Ka'opua. MSW. ACSW and the Hawai'i Area AIDS Education and Training Center: January 1992.

d. Caretaking/care giving

"Are there any people you can talk to about your HIV status?"
"Is there anyone in particular who helps you when you're sick?"
"What makes you feel better when you are sick?"
"What is an average day like for you?" (note lifestyle practices, key people, etc.)
"Are there any medical procedures which you do not want?"

e. Culturally familiar health care beliefs

"What kinds of treatment have you tried - medication, home remedies, or natural therapies?"
"Are there any specific medicines or healing agents that you want to use in your treatment?"
"Is there anything else that you think is important to include in your treatment?"

f. Coping style

"What are other stressful situations you have experienced? How did you deal with them?"
"Would you like to have done anything differently?"

g. Spirituality/Religion

"Can you help me understand your spiritual or religious beliefs?"

h. Substance Abuse

"What does drinking/using particular substances mean in you family?"
"Is substance use connected to a custom or ritual?" "How were the use of substances introduced to your people?"
"How common is substance use among your family and friends?"
"Who do you drink/shoot up with?"
"In what circumstances do you use substances?"

i. Other Culturally-affected Health Care Issues

"Are there special food preferences which you have that are important to you?"
"What do you think about autopsy?"