



Cultural Competence and Its Ethical Implications for Cross-Border Healthcare

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OUTLINE

- **Cultural Competence**
- **Role und Function of Cultural Competence in Clinical Ethics Consultation**
- **Limitations of Cultural Competence in Clinical Ethics Consultations**

Cultural Competence

Bertelsmann Foundation (ed. 2006):

‘Intercultural Competence is a ‘key skill for the twenty-first century’.

Cultural Competence from the ethical point of view

‘Intercultural competence is as a set of abilities and skills which promote an **awareness** of potential conflicts and improve an **understanding** of the underlying motifs in an intercultural context, in order to provide **ethically adequate** and pragmatic guidance to deal with any issues that may arise.’

Ilkilic (2013)

Cultural Competence

COMPETENCIES, ABILITIES AND SKILLS:

- Intercultural and Culture-Sensitive Communication
- Cultural Knowledge
- Avoidance of Stereotyping

Intercultural and Culture-Sensitive Communication

We are talking about intercultural interaction and communication “when the interacting partners are members of different cultures and at the same time are being consciously aware of the fact that the ‘other’ is different, thus experiencing one another as ‘alien’.”

Maletzke (1996)

CASE (Intercultural and Culture-Sensitive Communication)

In a German hospital, a very severely ill child of Turkish Muslim parents is being treated in a supposedly terminal situation. The healthcare team recommends reduction or discontinuation of therapy. On the other hand, the Muslim parents request maximal therapy. The doctor in charge, of German origin, intends to explain to the parents the medical futility of their child's treatment. She suggests, via an interpreter, **“If nature decides like this, we have to accept its verdict”**. If the translator were to render this phrase literally into Turkish, it would be understood to mean **“If the trees and the birds decide like this, we have to accept their verdict”**.

Cultural Knowledge

Cultural knowledge includes acquaintance with customary ways of action and attitudes held by persons from different cultural environments in dealing with illness, health, and questions surrounding the beginning and end of life.

Ilkilic (2013)

CASE (Cultural Knowledge)

A German nurse working on a palliative ward in Germany for the first time experiences relatives of a just deceased Muslim patient crying and shouting loudly. He is out of his depth and unsure if he should call a psychiatrist or the police. Later, he states that **if only he had known that there was such a cultural practice, he would have perceived the situation and responded to it differently.**

Ilkilic (2013)

Avoidance of Stereotyping

Stereotyping offers the individual actor a pragmatic tool to categorise and become orientated in a complex environment. However, this notion entails two characteristics of different nature: While on the one hand allowing for a necessary and useful mental categorisation, it may also give rise **to unjustified generalisation** based on externally acquired information or insufficient personal experience.

Heringer (2004)

CASE (Avoidance of Stereotyping)

A German woman who has converted to Islam visits a German doctor. She is accompanied by her Turkish husband, whose command of the German language is limited. The doctor, after examining the female German Muslim patient with headscarf, exclusively communicates with the Turkish husband. **The patient shows anger and asks the doctor why he is not talking to her.** After all, she is the patient and German is her native language.

Ilkilic (2017)

Role und Function of Cultural Competence in Clinical Ethics Consultation

In the context of a clinical ethics consultation, intercultural competence can help us

- to perceive the intercultural nature of a given ethical conflict adequately,
- to get a better understanding of the culturally determined background and the arguments being used
- to instantiate the ethical implications of the culturally determined arguments brought forward by the stakeholders more effectively in the ethical decision-making process

Limitations of Cultural Competence in Clinical Ethics Consultations

- Cultural competence cannot stand in for a concrete ethical approach
- Cultural competence is not able to establish how to weight cultural arguments within the decision-making process.
- Cultural competence does not provide arguments for meta-ethical discussions

CONCLUSIONS

1. Intercultural treatment situations are characterised by a complexity involving a significant potential for conflicts and thus require additional competencies on the part of the healthcare professionals involved.
2. Cultural competence is not an ethical approach to intercultural conflicts and cannot offer solutions for each and every problem,
3. It is seen as an indispensable factor for an intercultural opening of the healthcare system. Therefore, the relevant abilities and skills should be implemented in the healthcare system and education of healthcare professions.
4. From the ethical point of view, every patient must be observed and treated as an **individual person** and **not only as a member of cultural/ethnical/religious group**.

Thank you for your attention!