

AWARENESS, SENSITIVITY & COMPETENCE

Awareness, sensitivity and competence are the cornerstones of the 2006 PBH Cultural Competence Plan. When this plan was written, we understood that awareness is necessary when we talk about cultural competence and diversity. As a person and an organization becomes more aware and educated about cultural competence, a level of sensitivity to differences and similarities is a natural next step. This plan was written with this progression in mind and as a blueprint for developing cultural competence within our agency and provider network. The intent is to be dynamic in nature, with nine recommendation areas for competence: Mission & Vision, Décor, Access to Services, Assessment/Diagnosis/Treatment, Consumer-Driven Recovery, Human Resources, Education & Training, Community Engagement and Research/Monitoring/Evaluation. These areas were chosen through an extensive review of existing research which supported these areas as necessary elements of cultural competence.

The plan is represented in a matrix format. It is a three-year plan, addressing initial goal areas the first year. Thereafter, the goals increase in size, scope and competency levels. For each recommendation area there is a goal, an objective, activities and responsible teams. The activities are suggested activities that would assist in accomplishing the goals and objectives that have been established.

Cultural Competence does not end at the conclusion of the three years. We are continually assessing and will update our plan. Over the next 12 months, we will update the plan to extend to 2009-2012. If you have not had a chance to view the plan, it can be found at www.pbhcare.org/cultural.

Now, let's start from the beginning and answer some common questions about Cultural Competence.

What is Cultural Competence?

Cultural Competence is “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.” This allows us to identify and value difference, acknowledge the interactive dynamics of differences, expand out knowledge and resources to assist the people that we serve, collaborate with the community regarding services provisions and delivery, and to commit to cross-cultural training of staff developing policies to provide relevant, effective programs for the diversity of people served.

Why is it so important?

Cultural Competence is important for several reasons. The United States and North Carolina are increasing in diversity. By 2050, the majority of the U.S. population will be represented from a minority group. The minority will become the majority. As our communities become more diverse, mental health services are not exempt. We have to be prepared to meet the increasing needs of this demographic shift. Cultural Competence is also important because of the potential improvements in diagnosis & treatment. It is ethical and can potentially avoid, reduce, or eliminate malpractice and liability claims. Cultural Competence also satisfies legislative, regulatory, and accreditation mandates. (Revella, can you work on this sentence a little bit. It seems very awkward.) Cultural Competence also encourages a focus on recovery. There is a potential cost savings by decreasing an excessive use of inpatient treatments, decreasing diagnostic error, affecting LOS (length of stays), and addressing the under use of outpatient services.

How does it affect or relate to me and my job?

Everyone has a role in cultural competence. Our relationships with colleagues and how well we understand respect and relate to each other, is one way of exemplifying this principle. It is also an important part of our role to assist our network of providers to understand, respect and relate to their consumers in the same manner. We all have an individual and a corporate responsibility to promote an environment of inclusion, not exclusion.

Why is PBH putting so much emphasis on it?

PBH recognizes the changing demographics and the benefits to our employees and consumers. Consumers state that they desire to have their personal preferences, cultural, family, choices, and diversity understood and respected. By providing an effective service to our clientele, we are able to meet their needs initially without an increased rate of recidivism. In addition, the workplace environment becomes one where diversity is respected and esteemed. This allows for better teamwork and efficiency.

Cultural Competence is a principle that is recognized across many industries. As I have talked to people and participated in trainings, large corporations have embraced these concepts because they recognize the value it has to their organization. PBH is an industry leader. We recognize that providing and becoming a culturally competent agency is more than important, it is essential. Developing cultural competence is a journey, not a destination.