

Statement of Cultural Competence (2007)

(Adapted from the Medical Council of New Zealand's Statement on Cultural Competence – August 2006)

Purpose

Under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the Act) the Medical Laboratory Science Board (the Board) has been empowered to govern the practice of the profession of medical laboratory science in New Zealand. As part of this, the Board must set standards of cultural and clinical competence and ethical conduct. This statement outlines the attitudes knowledge and skills expected of medical laboratory science practitioners in their dealings with patients and colleagues. Cultural competence in the context of this statement includes the integration of the articles of the Treaty of Waitangi as outlined in the Act.

Introduction

Medical laboratory science practitioners work with, and have patient contact with, a culturally diverse population including those who identify with disability cultures, gay culture, or religious groups. Cross cultural interactions are therefore common and so medical laboratory science practitioners need to be competent in dealing with cultures that differ from their own.

Patient cultures affect the way they understand health and illness, how they access health services and how they respond to health care interventions. The purpose of cultural competence in the healthcare setting is to improve the quality of health care services in New Zealand.

Statutory Responsibilities

Under section 118(i) of the Act, the Board has responsibility to ensure the cultural competence of the medical laboratory science profession.

In addition the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights (the Code) imposes a statutory duty on medical laboratory science practitioners to ensure the "right to be treated with respect" and the "right to freedom from discrimination, coercion, harassment and exploitation".

Definition of Cultural Competence

The Medical Laboratory Science Board has adopted the following definition of Cultural Competence:

"Cultural competence is the awareness of cultural diversity and the ability to function effectively and respectfully when working with and dealing with people of different cultural backgrounds"

Culturally competent medical laboratory science practitioners therefore have the attitudes, skills and the knowledge needed to deal with a culturally diverse population. Cultural competence as defined applies to: ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, age, spiritual and other beliefs, social status and/or perceived economic worth.

Cultural Competence Standards

To work in the profession a medical laboratory science practitioner must demonstrate the appropriate attitudes, awareness, knowledge and skills with patients and colleagues of different cultural backgrounds.

Attitudes

- A willingness to understand your own cultural values and the influence these have on interactions with patients and colleagues.
- Commitment to the ongoing development of your own cultural awareness and practises and those of your colleagues and staff.
- A preparedness not to impose your own values on colleagues and patients.
- A willingness to appropriately challenge the cultural bias of individual colleagues.

Awareness and Knowledge

- Awareness of the limitations of your knowledge and an openness to ongoing learning of cultural differences.
- Awareness that general cultural information may not apply to specific patients and that individuals should not be thought of as stereotypes.
- Awareness that cultural factors affect health and illness, including disease prevalence and response to treatment.
- Respect for patients and an understanding of their cultural beliefs, values and practises.
- Understanding that a patient's cultural beliefs, values and practises, influence their perceptions of; health, illness and disease, healthcare practises, interactions with medical professionals and the healthcare system and treatment preferences.
- Understanding that the concept of culture extends beyond ethnicity and that patients may identify with several cultural groupings.

Skills

- Ability to recognise when your actions may not be acceptable or may be offensive to patients and colleagues.
- Ability to include a patient's family in their health care when appropriate.
- Ability to work co-operatively with others in a patient's culture, where this is desired by the patient and does not conflict with other clinical or ethical requirements.
- Ability to communicate effectively cross-culturally and recognise that the verbal and nonverbal communication styles of patients may differ from your own and adapt as required.
- Work effectively with interpreters when required.
- Seek assistance when necessary, to better understand the patient's cultural needs.