

## Enhancing Cultural Competence in Malaysian Nursing Students

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Dear Editor,

Malaysia is a multi-racial country with Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other minor races. According to a recent statistic by the Department of Statistics Malaysia of 2022, the total population was 32.7 million, with 30.2 million Malaysian citizens and 2.4 million non-citizens. Malaysian citizens comprise of Bumiputera or Malays (69.9%), Chinese (22.8%), Indians (6.6%), and others (0.7%) (1). Every race holds unique perspectives and beliefs on various aspects of life, such as social, economic, spiritual, and health. However, it is essential to acknowledge that health is the most crucial aspect. The Ministry of Health (MOH) is responsible for providing citizens with high-quality healthcare services that align with the teachings of Chapter 5, Verse 32 of the Quran. This verse emphasises the sanctity of human life and the prohibition of killing except for just cause:

"Because of that, We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless, for a soul or corruption [done] in the land, it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely" (2).

This verse emphasises the significance of protecting and preserving human life, promoting the idea of preventing harm and saving lives. The MOH plays a crucial role in fulfilling a fundamental Islamic principle outlined in the Quran by providing access to high-quality healthcare services, ultimately safeguarding and preserving human life. The ministry's obligation

to provide citizens with medical assistance, treatment, and preventive care is essential to society's well-being. It is crucial to uphold the Quranic values of compassion, mercy, and the sanctity of life. As per hospital policy, patients are the focal point of care delivery. Healthcare providers treat patients based on their medical needs and conditions and meet their cultural requirements.

The significance of addressing cultural requirements in healthcare, including religion and values, is frequently disregarded. Beliefs and values inherently influence people's behaviour and actions. Improving the delivery of healthcare requires a combination of patient-centeredness and cultural-centeredness. Healthcare providers can achieve patient-centred care while respecting patients' beliefs and values. Besides, the benchmark for measuring the quality of service that affects patients' satisfaction is the level of cultural competency among healthcare professionals (3).

Nurses must possess cultural competence in the medical field. The absence of comprehension and proficiency can significantly affect the quality of patient healthcare. Culture encompasses the collective values, beliefs, norms, patterns, and practices acquired and passed down through generations by individuals or groups (4). In order to benefit the public, a comprehensive understanding of cultural meanings and concepts is an absolute must for any researcher (5). Adopting a proper approach when serving diverse patients from different cultures is

imperative. Such an approach must consider language, communication, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours significantly impacting healthcare. However, it is unfortunate that nursing education often overlooks cultural competency and inadequately covers this crucial aspect. Moreover, it is imperative to note that the nursing curriculum is deficient in adequately emphasizing transcultural nursing care (6). The lack of MOH guidelines on cultural competency in Malaysia is inadequate for fostering the growth of nurses' cultural competence (7). Any nursing policy must guarantee that nursing students are provided with thorough academic and culturally based training.

Regrettably, the insufficiency of research and studies pertaining to cultural satisfaction in healthcare services is evident. Furthermore, the number of studies concentrating on enhancing cultural competency among nursing students is minimal. To effectively enhance healthcare delivery, it is imperative to commence at the primary level of nursing education. This study highlights the critical role of involving students in understanding cultural competence to enhance the quality of healthcare services. Exposing students to cultural competence at an early stage is imperative to achieve optimal healthcare services in the future. The idea of cultural competence must be implemented by nursing students as soon as they embark on their careers. In order to provide effective care that is tailored to patients' cultural needs, promoting compliance, healing, and wellness, nurses must possess cultural knowledge, as per Leininger's Culture Care Theory (8). As the world becomes more global and complex, it is important to have baseline data to gauge the level of cultural competence among student nurses in Malaysia. This is crucial for developing a realistic and sensitive understanding of people in enhancing healthcare services as a coping mechanism.

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