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Cultural Competence Module 15
Alternative Medicine

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Module 15: Alternative Medicine

Module Estimated Time: 25-30 minutes

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this module is to introduce the philosophy behind Alternative Medicine and its basic approach by a comparative process with Western Medicine. This side-by-side comparative will help students understand why cultural worldviews and perception about healthcare and medical services may differ, and how integrating these differences can impact the patient-provider relationship and maintain a quality of care cross-culturally.

Objectives:

Upon the completion of this module, the learner will:

1. Learn the Philosophy behind Alternative Medicine
2. Understand the basic approach about Alternative Medicine
3. Be able to distinguish major practices of Alternative and Western Medicine
4. Identify two or three example of practices of Complementary Medicine

Terminology

Holistic health
Holistic Practitioners
Healthcare Culture
Holism
Reductionism
Body, Mind and Spirit
Prevention
Complementary Medicine
Allopathic Medicine
Meditation
Stress
Detoxification
Cleansing
Herbal remedies
Acupuncture
Yoga
Health Prevention
Homeopathy
Ayurveda
Chinese medicine

1. **Alternative Medicine – A Philosophical Approach (Introductory Lecture)**
   Discuss the Basic Approach about Alternative Medicine

Time: 2 minutes

Materials: None

The basic philosophy of Alternative Medicine is based on the holistic approach, which is to keep every part of the body, including the spirit and the mind, in perfect harmony to prevent illness.

A holistic practitioner feels the duty to educate and provide information about how the body can maintain harmony and prevent illness without any external help, such as drugs or surgeries. In this respect, the patient has to be actively involved in order to understand his/her body parts and how each affects the others.

In many ways, Alternative Medicine is preventive medicine as it incorporates the idea of changes of lifestyle – adequate diet, increased exercise, or meditation – in order to keep the body in a healthy state.

2. **Complementary Medicine (Lecture)**
   Introduce Complementary Medicine as the result of integrating the Alternative Medicine approach into Western Medicine

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Laptop/Computer
LCD Projector/Screen
PowerPoint of Module 15

Preparation: Before class, prepare laptop, screen and LCD projector. Have remote control at hand to advance PowerPoint Slides.

Slide 1

In the U.S. we have two systems of Medicine: Western Medicine and Alternative Medicine. There are a few major differences between these two approaches:

1. Alternative Medicine focuses on health, while Western Medicine focuses on disease

2. Alternative Medicine focuses on a system approach, hence what happens in one part of the body cannot be understood without looking at the whole person (body, spirit and mind.) Western Medicine, on the other hand, focuses on symptoms and how to fix a particular system, sometime at the expense of another.

3. Lastly, while Alterative Medicine focuses on preventing and maintaining health before reaching a point of destruction, Western Medicine focuses on fixing a problem once this has occurred.

Slide 2

Western Medicine focuses on problem solving. The patient is seen as the disease and external factors, such as drugs and surgery, are looked at as a way to cure a specific system. A particular diagnosis in more than one patient may be addressed with the same protocol, thus treating the condition and not the patient per se.

Slide 3

With Alternative Medicine, unlike Western Medicine, a patient is assessed individually to understand the cause of the illness and he/she is treated based on that individual assessment. Alternative Medicine is based on holism and focuses on each patient as a unique individual made of three parts: the body, the mind and the spirit. In order to prevent illness, all three parts need to keep healthy. The alternative medicine patient, therefore, becomes actively engaged in understanding his body and how to keep it in harmony. The mind can be kept at a healthy state by stopping negative thoughts; the

spirit can be helped by meditation; the body can be helped with a good diet and exercise regimen.

Slide 4

In Western Culture, the body, the mind and the spirit are treated separately by separate people: the body is treated by medical doctors; the mind is treated by a psychiatrist; and the spirit is typically left to a priest, rabbi or pastor. None of these roles overlap or are coordinated together even when we know that mental stress can cause many problems to the body. The lack of coordination of problems that are interconnected between the body, the mind and the spirit is said to be one of the biggest failures of Western Medicine.

Slide 5

Biomedicine refers to the "body-as-machine." This is a powerful way of conceptualizing the body in Western medicine and predominantly in the Anglo culture. The core belief of Biomedicine is that diagnosis and treatment should be based on scientific data. Biomedicine is not so much concerned with the practice of medicine, rather with the research aspect. The results of this research lead to new drugs and molecular understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the disease.

The maintenance of health is carried out by scientific mechanisms such as immunizations or medical procedures such as annual screenings (e.g. mammograms, Prostate exams, etc.)

Western Medicine today is becoming more and more influenced by the theories of Alternative Medicine, combined with several approaches of Biomedicine. The evermore present practice of acupuncture or chiropractic in Western Medicine is an example of this fusion.

3. **Which type of approach do you believe in? (Activity)**
Students will have an opportunity to assess which type of approach is more powerful and the right choice for them, as well as what problems should be treated with Western Medicine and what problems should be treated with Alternative Medicine.

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Handout for Module 15

Slide 4

Before activity-
1) Instruct students to form groups of four
2) Give a handout for Module 15 to all students
4) Instruct to check whether each of the listed problems should be fixed with an Alternative Medicine or Western Medicine approach

During Activity – Students share a belief around illness with group and write it on the handout under the approach that best aligns with the example given.

4. **Learning about the benefit of both approaches (Whole Class Discussion)**
   Instructor will elicit students' feedback based on previous activity

Time: 3 minutes

Materials: None

Ask two or three students to share one of the example used with the rest of class.

5. **Final Thoughts on Alternative and Complementary Medicine (Closing Lecture)**
   Discuss how Complementary Medicine has combined Alternative Medicine with Western Medicine.

Time: 2 minutes

Materials: None

Close this lesson with these points:

Although there still remains a lot of skepticism with some alternative practices, in general Alternative Medicine has been embraced in the United States, bringing much comfort, good health and healing to many culturally diverse patients.

The integration of Alternative Medicine into Western Medicine is referred to as Complementary Medicine. This includes chiropractic practices, acupuncture, or the use of herbal remedies. However is Complementary Medicine really offering a true alternative approach?

As mentioned earlier, Alternative Medicine allows for an active partnership between provider and patient. The provider becomes the educator; the patient is the student who needs to understand his body to be able to maintain health.

Unfortunately the Western paradigm is provider-based, not patient-based. The framework around Western Medicine is not conducive to a true partnership with the patient and, often the patient does not take an active part in his/her treatment.

In this sense, Complementary Medicine, because it has integrated alternative approaches into a Western approach to patient care, more often does not really offer a true alternative approach. In order for Complementary Medicine to become more holistic, a shift needs to take place toward a more patient-centered approach, in an individualistic way.

Module 15

Which type of approach do you believe in?

Instructions:

Write problems you identify should be fixed preferably using an Alternative Medicine approach and which should be addressed with a Western Medicine approach?

Headache **Sinus Infection** **Cough** **Stress**

Depression **Back pain** **Lack of Sleep** **Cellulitis**

Urinary Tract Infection **Toothache** **Stomach Cramps**

Holistic Approach **Medical Approach**