

Chapter 5

Intercultural Communication with a patient How can culture cause problems?

Nursing is closely involved with some of the most important events of a person's life: when a child is born, when someone becomes critically ill, or when someone is dying. These events are usually filled with emotion, meaning, or tradition. However, the meaning of these events to the patient may be very different depending upon the cultural beliefs of the patient.

Many nurses feel awkward and uncomfortable when they talk with someone from another culture. The nurse should be able to be helpful to any patient going through a crisis. This requires the nurse to recognize and value how people are different. Nurses cannot accurately tell whether patients have a problem or how to help them without understanding the cultural meaning of the event for the patients.

Language is often a barrier to understanding. Sometimes patients speak different languages, or they may use the same words, but the meaning is different.

In talking to patients, the nurse should ask if they have any special beliefs or things they do when they are ill. Ask them about what they like to eat or unusual medicines they might take. Inquire about whether they have a spiritual leader who should be called. See if there is anything special they would like you to do for them, or anything you should avoid.