Cultural Competency Policy

Introduction

• Cultural competence and cultural safety go far beyond notions of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity.

• Cultural competence finds legitimacy in the positive experience of the client and improved health outcomes, and

• Cultural competence must be integrated in the delivery of social services in order to reduce the institutionalized racism that prevails in the mainstream social work interventions.

Definitions

Cultural Competence refers to the relationship between the helper and the person being helped, in a cross-cultural context. While cultural safety centres on the experiences of the patient, cultural competence focuses on the capacity of the social worker to improve wellbeing by integrating culture into the clinical context. This last point is important, and demonstrates the importance of moving beyond cultural awareness. Recognition of culture is not by itself sufficient rationale for requiring cultural competence; instead the point of the exercise is to maximize gains from a social work intervention where the parties are from different cultures.

Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Operationally defined, cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of clinical services; thereby producing better “healing” outcomes. Cultural competence is an important vehicle to increasing access to quality care for all clients, by tailoring delivery to meet patients’ social, cultural, spiritual and linguistic needs.
Cultural safety is based on the experience of the recipient of counseling, rather than from the perspective of the family counselor. It involves the effective care of a person or family from another culture by a counselor who has undertaken a process of reflection on their own cultural identity and recognizes the impact their culture has on their own practice.

Cultural safety aims to enhance the delivery of services by identifying the power relationship between the counselor and the client, and empowering the client to take full advantage of the counseling service offered. Unsafe cultural practice is any action that diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and wellbeing of an individual. Clients who feel unsafe and who are unable to express degrees of felt risk may subsequently require intensive intervention. Cultural safety gives marginalized people the power to comment on the care provided, leading to reinforcement of positive experiences. It also enables them to be involved in changes in any service experienced as negative.

Cultural safety recognizes that inequalities within counseling intervention represent in microcosm the inequalities in access to clinical services that have prevailed through history and within Canada more generally. It accepts the legitimacy of difference and diversity in human behaviour and social structure. It recognizes that the attitudes and beliefs, values, policies and practices of family counselors can act as barriers to service access, and is concerned with quality improvement in service delivery and client rights.

Rationale

Several studies have indicated that aboriginal community is at a greater risk for domestic violence, addiction, mental health, diabetes and cardiovascular illnesses. Often marginalized communities also fall in the same category where South Asian and Black communities are at higher risk for diabetes and cardiovascular illnesses. While these facts were known for a long time, only now the health care bodies are beginning to do something about it.

In addition, there is evidence that marginalized communities are unable to access culturally appropriate social services. The “talk therapy” is not understood and often “stigma” related to “disclosures of personal information” hinders communities to social work interventions.
The Service System

There are five essential elements that contribute to a service system’s ability to become more culturally competent.

MIAG will:

1. Value diversity
2. Have the capacity for cultural self-assessment
3. Be conscious of the “dynamics” inherent when cultures interact
4. Institutionalize cultural knowledge, and
5. Develop adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures

These five elements must be present in every level of the service delivery system. They should be reflected in attitudes, values, structures, policies, and services.