

Quality Assurance for Mental Health Services - the UK Perspective

D. Bhugra¹

¹David Golberg Centre, Maudsley International, London, United Kingdom

Every individual is born into culture and has cultural values, norms and models integrated in their being. Cultural values affect cognitive schema and therefore our world view. Cultures determine deviance and abnormality and suggest which health care systems to be followed and what resources should be allocated to them. There is little doubt that, both in physical and mental illness, culture impacts upon presentation, development and perpetuation of symptoms. Cultural psychiatry has developed as a speciality in its own right during the last 75 years or so. Cultural competency is defined as an ability to understand and be aware of cultural factors in the therapeutic interaction between the therapist and the patient. These include awareness of social, cultural, religious factors, attitudes, behaviours, models and explanations. This should be applicable to all patients and all therapeutic interactions. Cultural competency training at its core is about good clinical practice and the clinicians. It is about an understanding of the concepts of culture and how cultures can influence human behaviour, interpretations of that behaviour and how that behaviour is evaluated. It is about the ability to understand one's own prejudices, a willingness to identify and explore one's own cultural base (values, beliefs and attitudes) and to identify useful and culturally appropriate strategies for working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The therapist must be aware of their own likes, dislikes, beliefs stereotypes, of their own identity; and must possess an ability to be neutral and open-minded, an ability to learn about other cultures and differences as well as the strengths and weaknesses of their own/other cultures.