

# Business Implications of Cultural Humility in the Healthcare Setting

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**W**hen those in the healthcare sector talk about cultural humility—a lifelong process of self-reflection and discovery to build honest relationships/deferential stance toward people of other cultures that drives one to challenge cultural biases—it generally centers on the doctor-patient relationship. A case in point: Last year, our chief medical officer, O’Neil J. Pyke, MD, SHFM, did a MEDtalk, “[Improve Your Interactions with the 5 Rs of Cultural Humility](#),” at HM17 that was geared to hospitalists as well as a presentation at the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) 2017 Annual Conference on the related topic of [cultural competency for patient engagement](#).

Of course, promoting cultural humility throughout a healthcare organization goes beyond outcomes relative to the delivery of care, patient satisfaction, and the mitigation of risks as they relate to medical malpractice. It can improve a healthcare organization’s business outcomes and be a positive influence in other areas as well.

## The Impact of Social Responsibility

Social responsibility from a business perspective, the subject of my doctoral dissertation, is especially relevant to this discussion. When you compare firms with a social responsibility statement and commitment to balance profit-making activities with actions that benefit society to those that have not adopted a formal social responsibility philosophy—then review both groups’ stock prices—the results are quite telling.

Companies that initiate and/or champion philanthropic efforts, environmental programs, and other civic-minded initiatives to benefit their communities also increase their levels of customer and employee intimacy. In addition, being socially responsible leads to legitimate business outcomes, such as increased retention measures, decreased risk, and improved financial outcomes for these businesses, which make them more valuable in the marketplace.

By fostering cultural humility at your hospital or health system, and ensuring it is embedded throughout its service offerings, your healthcare organization can realize similar benefits.

Read on to learn about six significant steps to increase the practice of cultural humility within your organization, which will not only increase patients’ trust and support the delivery higher quality care, but also build business value and maximize revenue.

## THE BENEFITS OF PROMOTING A FOCUS ON CULTURAL HUMILITY FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Promoting cultural humility can help strengthen relationships among staff, staff and leadership, and staff and patients. In addition, a focus on cultural humility can support higher quality care. If staff feel valued, they will be better equipped to care for others. These skills translate to providers’ work with patients, who are then more trusting of their providers, and thus better able to openly communicate about their health, wellness, and histories of trauma.

Placing an emphasis on cultural humility also encourages organizations to make purposeful, deliberate efforts to build a more diverse workforce, which can help them become more representative of those they serve. Lastly, the processes of reflection, deep engagement, and self-critique that are embedded in cultural humility can help an organization recognize the importance of self-care and pay attention to staff burnout. This helps with staff turnover and keeps current employees healthier, happier, and better able to provide for their patients or clients.

Schulman, M. and Gingrich, M. (2017, August 22). Cultural humility: a key element of trauma-informed care [Weblog post]. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS), Inc.: <https://www.chcs.org/cultural-humility-key-element-trauma-informed-care/>

**1 Organize a candid and thorough assessment.** To be effective in the implementation and/or improvement of a formal plan to promote cultural humility within your organization, you must first establish and evaluate the areas in need of development, such as communication among staff members, clinicians and patients, and leadership and staff. Take an open, honest look at issues that have arisen in relation to hiring practices, racial bias, disparities, and other areas where cultural humility is imperative for engendering trust, fairness, sensitivity, and mutual understanding. Then, reflect on how these areas could be better addressed as you develop your strategy.

#### FIVE SELF-REFLECTION EXERCISES FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL HUMILITY

- Identify your own cultural and family beliefs and values
- Define your own personal culture/identity: ethnicity, age, experience, education, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.
- Determine whether you are aware of your personal biases and assumptions about people with different values than yours
- Challenge yourself in identifying your own values as “the norm”
- Describe a time when you became aware of being different from other people

Fletcher, K. (2007, April 1). Are you practicing cultural humility? – The key to success in cultural competence [Weblog post]. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from California Health Advocates: <https://cahealthadvocates.org/are-you-practicing-cultural-humility-the-key-to-success-in-cultural-competence/>

**2 Create a mission and vision statement.** It is crucial to the success of your cultural humility initiative. Moreover, it will help explain your organization’s objectives in a clear and concise manner, center on what is important, and provide a foundation for advancing other aspects of your strategic plan. Invite clinical and non-clinical staff,

from physicians and nurses to patient access representatives and unit clerks, to participate in the statement’s composition. It will help you arrive at a declaration that delineates what staff would like to see happen in terms of furthering open exchanges and circumstances through which cultural humility should be addressed.

**3 Ensure your organization is aligned.** An aligned hospital or health system that is focused and deliberate in its actions can execute more efficiently. Fortunately, there are several ways to reinforce alignment, from messaging, to internal branding, to lunch-and-learn events. Most important, management must be on the same page. Administrators who promote the practice of cultural humility as an organization realize positive patient experiences, including patient satisfaction, lower incidences of readmissions, decreased instances of medical malpractice, and better outcomes. They also stimulate better relationships within their work environment, which results in a more sympathetic organization that functions more effectively.

**4 Measure alignment, staff engagement, and quality of care.** Patient satisfaction and experience are two areas that should be among the first that healthcare leaders assess. If those who receive care at your hospital or health system feel discontented, disrespected, rushed, and/or unheard or say they have had a poor customer experience, it could indicate a lack of cultural humility in your workplace. Of course, these kinds of issues do not begin and end with physician interactions. Rather, they reflect the patient’s complete experience, from the person who checked them in, to the medical assistant who took their temperature/collected information, to the nurse or advanced practitioner who saw them before they met with the doctor.

Valuable, tried-and-true tools for assessing alignment, staff engagement, and the quality of care provided include surveys/requests for feedback. Consider asking questions like, “Was your check-in process pleasant? If not, what

would have made it better?" and "Were you comfortable throughout your experience here?" The key is ensuring the measures you employ evaluate the entire patient experience.

Similarly, when you administer employee engagement surveys and review the scores, ultimately, you want to see that your staff feels respected and valued, and that different points of view are both heard and understood. Cultural humility must be organizational to be truly organic and something that brings a hospital or health system together for the maximum benefit of all.

**5 Generate mindfulness through mandatory training for all staff members.** In addition to consistently seeking feedback from your people, make sure your organization has training in place that brings knowledge and instruction in house that will make your employees more aware of the benefits of cultural humility as well as the consequences of its absence. Work toward cultivating a common vernacular around culture and race to help your staff experience better interactions and resolution of disputes, especially concerning those that exemplify prejudice. It will be an ongoing process that requires commitment, education, change, and a continued focus. You should anticipate periods of correction, too, and allow for them in your staff's training and development.

**6 Develop a cultural humility committee.** Ideally, it should be comprised of a cross-pollination of your staff—including physicians, mid-level providers, healthcare executives, and administrative professionals—who are interested in having an active role in the promotion of cultural humility within your organization. Collectively, the committee should seek opportunities to advance the conversation on issues regarding race, feelings of oppression, and culture; assist in keeping all staff engaged and invested in the practice of cultural humility; and help ensure constructive solutions are maintained.

## LOCUM TENENS PROVIDERS AND CULTURAL HUMILITY

- Many locum tenens providers recurrently accept jobs in areas with diverse patient populations or choose opportunities to serve distinct populations through government-run healthcare organizations, like the Indian Health Service and VA hospitals. Their locum tenens experiences further their respect and understanding of people with cultures/identities different to their own.
- Reputable locum tenens staffing companies provide cultural humility training and materials for the physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and CRNAs who accept opportunities through their firms. For instance, Medicus Healthcare Solutions' CMO, O'Neil J. Pyke, MD, SHFM, presents webinars, presentations, written content, and more to benefit our providers and others interested in promoting cultural humility. (Read "The Importance of Patient-related Cultural Humility," a post published by *Physicians Practice*, October 2017, in which Dr. Pyke is featured.)

## Cristina Muise, President



Cristina Muise came to Medicus Healthcare Solutions in 2008, assuming the role of Chief Operating Officer and bringing with her considerable experience in finance and operations. In addition to influencing the company's strategic direction, she maintains oversight of its overall operations and finances, and sits on its Board of Directors.

Under Ms. Muise's leadership, Medicus Healthcare Solutions is regularly recognized as a leading healthcare company with outstanding accomplishments in innovative business performance, dynamic workplace culture, employee satisfaction, and customer commitment. The company's most recent achievements include being named among the Best Staffing Firms to Work For by Staffing Industry Analysts and Becker's Hospital Review's 150 Top Places

to Work in Healthcare, earning Inavero's Best of Staffing Client Satisfaction and Best of Staffing Talent Satisfaction Awards, and a coveted spot on the Inc. 5000 List, as well as accolades from Modern Healthcare and DecisionWise.

Prior to joining Medicus, Ms. Muise owned and operated a consulting practice and served in faculty positions at Stonehill College and Merrimack College. Moreover, for 12 years, she served as Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer at GlobalWare Solutions, where she was responsible for day-to-day operations for locations in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

Currently, Ms. Muise serves on the Advisory Board of UBERDOC and the National Association of Locum Tenens (NALTO) Board of Directors. She is an inactive CPA and holds a BA in accounting from Merrimack College, an MBA in Finance from Bentley College, and a PhD in Finance from Walden University.

*For measures on increasing physician alignment and collaboration at your healthcare organization, download Muise's white paper titled, "[How to Attain Successful Physician Alignment Goals at Your Facility.](#)"*

## About medicus healthcare solutions

Medicus Healthcare Solutions has been providing exceptional physician and advanced practice providers to medical groups, practices, health systems, hospitals, and other facilities throughout the United States since 2004. Over the past 14 years, the company has expanded its services to include project and resource management services, and consulting services for building and optimizing medical service lines and revenue cycle processes. Recently, the company launched medicusOne<sup>SM</sup>, an innovative all-in-one staffing solution that provides the benefits of an MSP and the services of a VMS, and through its exclusive mSolve<sup>SM</sup> method, Medicus has built a reputation for its unique personalized approach with clients. With over 350 employees—at company headquarters in Windham, New Hampshire, and offices in Denver, Colorado, and Houston, Texas—Medicus Healthcare Solutions is one of the fastest-growing, award-winning companies in the healthcare staffing industry.