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Interactive Scenario 1 - Gebru's Appendicitis

In the following interactive scenario, a dialogue will be presented between a patient, Mrs. Desta Gidada, and a provider, Dr. Richard Allen. At the end of the scenario, you will be asked to critique Dr. Allen's behaviors during the interaction.

Desta Gidada (a 28-year-old immigrant from Ethiopia, who has lived in America since she was a child and speaks clear English, with a slight accent) is speaking with the Emergency Room doctor, Dr. Allen (a 43-year-old, Caucasian-American doctor), about her 5-year-old son, Gebru.

Gebru has been experiencing pain on the right side of his abdomen for several days now, and the pain has been getting worse. After talking to Mrs. Gidada about her son's symptoms and conducting an examination, Dr. Allen has diagnosed Gebru as having probable appendicitis.

Mrs. Desta Gidada, and Dr. Allen, and Gebru Gidada

Dr. Allen

Your son is very ill. I think that he has appendicitis. He needs surgery to remove his appendix before it ruptures. There is a good chance that it has not ruptured, because he is still having so much pain. I am going to order some laboratory tests as soon as possible.

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- Mrs. Desta Gidada I know that my son is very sick. Can you give him some strong medicine to make him well?
- Dr. Allen I don't think you understand. There is no medicine to make him better. If we wait much longer, he could die from complications of a ruptured appendix. I need you to sign the consent form for surgery.
- Mrs. Desta Gidada I cannot sign this form until my husband and his father and mother can come. Please, I would like some medicine for my son.
- Dr. Allen We do not have much time. I am calling the surgeon to come here to evaluate your son. If you need your husband, then call him now.
- Mrs. Desta Gidada I want you to help my son. I do not want you to cut him open to help him. That would not be a good thing if my husband is not here to say.
- Dr. Allen You're in America now, and here it is considered to be neglect when a parent refuses a treatment that can save a child's life. If you do not sign, we will call in Child Protective Services.

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What do you think?

In this scenario, did the doctor apply a unified approach to health communication and recognize and adapt to the unique cultural background, health literacy levels, and English language proficiency levels of this patient?

Scenario Question Feedback

No, the doctor did not apply a unified approach to health communication, and, therefore did not take into account the cultural differences and the patient's possible limited health literacy issues that were affecting his communication with the patient.

What do you recommend?

What could Dr. Allen have done to provide culturally competent care?

Scenario Question Feedback

Culturally competent providers understand and respect their patients' values and beliefs. They understand the importance of their patients' culture to the patient-provider interaction and adapt the way they deliver care to each patient's needs and expectations.

Mrs. Gidada's cultural background taught her that her husband and his family were responsible for decisions such as these, so she did not feel empowered to sign the consent. Dr. Allen should have been aware of and respected Mrs. Gidada's beliefs, and adjusted his message accordingly.

Dr. Allen should have worked with Mrs. Gidada to find a solution that took into account Mrs. Gidada's beliefs and was acceptable to both him and Mrs. Gidada. Instead, by attempting to scare and threaten Mrs. Gidada into signing the consent form, Dr. Allen shut down the communication between

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them and switched their focus from Gebru's health to defending their positions to each other.

Additionally, cultural competency involves not allowing biases to keep us from treating every individual with respect. It requires an honest assessment of one's positive and negative assumptions about others.

The comment "you're in America now" may indicate that Dr. Allen let his personal biases towards people of a different culture prevent him from treating Mrs. Gidada with respect. Dr. Allen needs to become aware of and examine his biases so they don't affect his health communication.

What do you think?

Dr. Allen did not recognize and respond to a possible sign that Mrs. Gidada may have limited health literacy, and that her limited health literacy may be affecting the communication. What was the sign that Dr. Allen missed?

Scenario Question Feedback

Health literacy is the degree to which individuals can obtain, process, and understand basic health information needed to make appropriate health decisions.

Mrs. Gidada's resistance to surgery and requests for medicine to help her son could have been indicators of limited health literacy, as she may not have understood what appendicitis is or that it can be cured only by surgery.

Additionally, the fact that Mrs. Gidada wanted medicine instead of surgery may have been a cultural issue. It's possible that her cultural background taught her that everything can be cured with medicine, or that surgery is something to fear and avoid.

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What do you recommend?

What could Dr. Allen have done to address a possible limited health literacy issue?

Scenario Question Feedback

To address possible issues of limited health literacy, Dr. Allen could have adjusted his message and used plain language to explain what appendicitis is, the dangers involved in it, and what the situation was urgent. He could have then applied the Teach-Back method to ensure that Mrs. Gidada understood what he was saying.