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## Journal of the National Medical Association

Volume 106, Summer 2014, Pages 42-49

Original Communication

### Linking Cultural Competence to Functional Life Outcomes in Mental Health Care Settings

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[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0027-9684\(15\)30069-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0027-9684(15)30069-9)

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#### Abstract

Minorities in the United States have well-documented health disparities. Cultural barriers and biases by health care providers may contribute to lower quality of services which may contribute to these disparities. However, evidence linking cultural competency and health outcomes is lacking. This study, part of an ongoing quality improvement effort, tested the mediation hypothesis that patients' perception of provider cultural competency indirectly influences patients' health outcomes through process of care. Data were from patient satisfaction surveys collected in seven mental health clinics (n=94 minority patients). Consistent with our hypothesis, patients' perception of clinicians' cultural competency was indirectly associated with patients' self-reported improvements in social interactions, improvements in performance at work or school, and improvements in managing life problems through the patients' experience of respect, trust, and communication with the clinician. These findings indicate that process of care characteristics during the clinical encounter influence patients' perceptions of clinicians' cultural competency and affect functional outcomes.

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#### Keywords

Cultural competency; Ethnic health disparities; Clinician-patient Trust; Communication; Respect

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**Financial Disclosure:** This project was conducted in part with the support of Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences Wayne State University School of Medicine and the State of Michigan Joe F. Young Sr. Psychiatric Research and Training Program.

