Cultural Competency Staff Survey
at Piedmont Behavioral Healthcare

Report on the Qualitative Responses

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1. Introduction

In 2005, Piedmont Behavioral Healthcare (PBH) began a Cultural Competence Initiative. Developed by 25 members of the Cultural Competence Study Group, the Cultural Competency Plan is a three year organizational change initiative that promotes cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency. Five organizational areas were targeted: Mission and Vision, Décor, Human Resources, Education and Training, and Community Engagement.

As part of ongoing evaluation of the initiative, a survey of PBH staff was conducted to assess their understanding and application of Cultural Competency principles in the organization. PBH also sought feedback from staff regarding changes to office décor that have been implemented to more fully express cultural diversity in the workplace.

1.1. The purpose and structure of this report

The Centre for Community Based Research was approached by WLT consulting to conduct a brief qualitative analysis of the survey data. The goal of this report is to provide a general description of the qualitative responses of staff and some general implications for the PBH Cultural Competency initiative. This report is organized according to six survey questions\(^1\), as follows:

5. What is Cultural Competency?
6. What does Cultural Competency mean to you professionally?
7. How are you applying Cultural Competency in your current job?
8. In what ways has your department or your position recognized the importance of Cultural Competence?
9. What are the three stages of PBH’s Cultural Competency Plan?
10. As you may be aware, PBH is modifying the décor of our offices to reflect cultural diversity. What suggestions do you have for this initiative?

The report is divided into two main sections. We will first examine responses to questions about the definition of cultural competency and the PBH initiative itself. In this subsection we will review results from questions 5, 6, and 9. Second we will examine responses to questions about the application of cultural competency at an organizational level. This will cover questions 7, 8 and 10.

We would like to note several things about these questions and the subsequent responses from PBH staff. First, it is clear that the questions have significant overlapping qualities. Questions 5, 6, and 7 are all quite similar. This appears to have significantly reduced the variation in responses, as many staff repeated answers or left redundant questions unanswered. We will note differences where appropriate.

Second, questions 1 and 5 are written (presumably) for the purpose of content testing, to examine the extent to which staff has gained targeted knowledge about Cultural Competency. For this reason, the analysis does not go beyond basic level description of the responses, i.e., the extent to which staff generally provided the “correct” answer.

\(^1\) We have retained the actual numbers of the questions used in the survey of staff, 5 through 10.
Third, we would like to note that the responses did not lend themselves to in-depth analysis of a cultural competence in practice. For the most part, responses had a general, surface quality to them and were quite uncontroversial. For example, question 7 asks about application. For the most part staff reiterated the general definition (or intent) of cultural competency in reference to their day to day work (e.g., attempting to be aware of and sensitive to cultural difference).

In this report we utilize, for convenience, a simple set of descriptors regarding frequency of responses when presenting the results:

- **No/none**: no individual identified the particular issue or topic;
- **A couple**: two individuals identified the particular issue or topic;
- **A few**: three to five individuals expressed a particular opinion;
- **Some**: between one-tenth and one-half of the respondents interviewed expressed particular opinion;
- **Many/most**: the majority of, but not all, individuals were of the same opinion and/or held similar perceptions regarding a selected issue or topic;
- **All**: All interviewees questioned on the topic expressed the same view or held the same/similar opinion.

### 1.2 Description of the Survey Sample

The survey was completed by 61 individuals. This number can be broken down into 13 departments of PBH. The highest return rate (26%) was from the PDS department. We do not have access to the total number of staff nor the number of staff for each department; consequently we are unable to calculate the total and departmental return rates. The distribution of departments represented in the survey can be found in Figure 1, which can be used by PBH to examine return rates.
2. Understanding Cultural Competency

Following from the work of Cross, et al.\(^2\), PBH’s Cultural Diversity initiative used the following definition of Cultural Competence:

“Cultural Competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables this system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Competence implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual or organization within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors and needs presented by consumers, organizations, and communities.”

We are presuming that this definition was provided to staff and discussed as part of their organizational initiatives. The first question we examined asked staff to provide this definition, by asking “What is Cultural Competency?”

2.1 What is Cultural Competency?

Most of the respondents provided a general definition of cultural competence that focused on awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences, such as language, beliefs, forms of dress, and so on. For example:

[Cultural competency means] understanding and sensitivity of other cultures and their influence on person's attitudes and behaviors

Some respondents elaborated beyond the recognition of differences and included an understanding how cultural differences impact individuals and their ability to succeed. Two staff produced the exact definition of cultural competency, suggesting a “cut and paste” response to the online survey.

A couple of respondents also described how having cultural awareness and knowledge or helps them in their communication with individuals of different cultures. This additional element of competence being related to “functioning” within an organizational or professional context comes a little bit closer to the preferred definition:

Cultural Competence is when you recognize differences in cultures and adapt your services and business to accommodate their needs.

Having understanding and knowledge of different needs based on diverse culture and utilization of this need to work out solutions

Some staff provided definitions that took a more a systemic, organizational perspective. This included ideas about cultural competency requiring a congruency between the organization’s mandate, message, and values and the actual provision of services. These staff also referred to the importance of fostering organizational environments that ensured that different cultural groups can work together in the presence of differences. Here a few examples:

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Cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge, information, and data about individuals and groups of people into specific clinical standards, skills, service approaches, techniques, and marketing programs that match the individual's culture and increase the quality and appropriateness of health care and outcomes.

Cultural Competence is our abilities to consider culture in the way that we deliver services to our consumers and to each other. It is also a systematic change within an organization.

[Cultural Competence is] the development of skills by individuals and systems to live and work with, educate, and serve diverse individuals and communities.

A few viewed cultural competency in terms of equality and inclusion—treating everyone equally regardless of their gender, religious, sexual or cultural orientation:

[Cultural competency is] accepting others regardless of their different orientation (sexual, ethnic, race etc) and having capacity (emotional) to use this understanding in whatever we do.

In summary, all staff were able to provide a definition that underscored the importance, at minimum, of being aware and sensitive to cultural differences. Some staff were able to broaden this definition to include the relationship of cultural competency to organizational and professional practice.

2.2 What does Cultural Competency mean to you professionally?

This question tended to produce a repetition of answers to question 1. What is Cultural Competence?”, albeit leading staff to answer in reference to their actual work. Below are some typical responses:

Using knowledge and awareness of other cultures with sensitivity to provide services to people belonging to different cultural backgrounds

Remembering not everyone shares the same values and beliefs I do. Working to ensure I am honoring others beliefs and allowing for differences of cultures in reviewing incidents and complaints.

This question leads many staff to mention the role of cultural competency in communicating and understanding others in order to meet their needs as clients. For some, listening to consumers, families, and other stakeholders with cultural factors in mind is a key element of cultural competency.

It is the ability to understand the way to communicate effectively and with respect with people from different cultures.

Having the knowledge and understanding of other cultures so that I am sensitive to how I approach person from those cultures as well as the words I use or my body language/actions. For example, in working with persons from the deaf and
hard of hearing culture, it is inappropriate and offensive to talk to and look at the interpreter instead of the Deaf and/or hard of hearing person.

This idea is reinforced quite eloquently in this example:

*Everyday, inside PBH and outside throughout my community, I have interactions with many people who, in some way, differ from me. I have always maintained the belief that in each interaction, we both walk away having left a little of ourselves behind in the mind of the other. It is in this manner, I embrace these interactions as a stepping stone to better the next one.*

While we generally viewed answers to this question as reiterations of previous answers, there were some subtle additions that referenced practice. For example, some respondents viewed cultural competency as a way to identify and respond to the services needs of different cultural groups. For a few others it means to provide services in a manner that respects individuals and preserves their identity.

Similar to question 1, some staff spoke at an organizational level, so that cultural competence means, professionally, to promote diversity in the workplace regardless of beliefs, race, etc., for the ultimate good of the organization. For a few, it means providing an opportunity for employees to observe their cultural beliefs and expressions in the workplace and via flexible schedules and accommodations.

There was also a few staff who emphasized the importance of ongoing learning in relation to cultural competence, to improve services and make them more responsive to individuals and communities:

*I have really tried to accept others for who they are and I am interested in learning about others and how they learn. That is something that caught my attention at the CC Conference...about how different cultures change over times and how a black male may have a different way of learning things than a white male.*

2.3 What are the three stages of PBH’s Cultural Competency Plan?

The majority of respondents (57%) correctly identified the three stages (Awareness, Sensitivity, and Competency) of PBH’s Cultural Competency Plan. There were 8 (13%) respondents who were not aware of the Cultural Competency Plan. Answers from the remaining 30% diverged from the stated components of the Plan, most only slightly, a few considerably.

It is difficult to interpret these results, other than to suggest the degree of minimal awareness of the plan, which seemed fairly high -- if we include some minor "labeling mistakes", over two-thirds of staff had an awareness of the components. It should be noted that several staff said that they looked up the answers online. We of course are uncertain how prevalent this might have been for other respondents. In general, we recommend avoiding simple content questions since they do not tend to yield actionable information.

3 1) Awareness; 2) Sensitivity and 3) Competency
3. Applying understanding of Cultural Competency

Survey questions 7 and 8 are about applying principles of Cultural Competency in the work setting. Question 7 focuses on individual staff members and question 8 deals with the application of this understanding in specific departments in which individual staff members carry out their duties. However, in practice these distinctions can be blurred and we found this was reflected in the survey responses – there were similar kinds of responses under both the categories and little qualitative difference with question 6, regarding “what Cultural Competence means to you professionally”?

3.1 How are you applying Cultural Competency in your current job?

Most of the respondents view Cultural Competency as beneficial to their work and many reported drawing on it to effectively communicate with others. For a few of the respondents, a greater understanding of Cultural Competency has helped them overcome their own prejudices and stereotypes, leading them to become more sympathetic and understanding towards others. A protection against personal bias is reflected in this quote:

Understanding the needs of different consumers and not to let my own attitudes, experiences and cultural differences interfere or influence the way I deal with consumers.

Some participants reported using Cultural Competence to understand and identify consumers’ needs. Some individuals reported using bi-lingual or gender specific staff, interpreters or sign language to effectively communicate with consumers.

I have worked with Spanish speaking family and made sure I had an interpreter to help me with language and cultural barriers.

Working in access you have to always be prepared for any type of call. If someone calls and does not speak English well, we can offer interpreter services. Going the extra mile for every call makes a difference in how well the individual or family will follow up on needed services be it DD, MH or SA.

A few of the survey participants applied their understanding within the organization. They highlighted such things as educating the staff about the importance of cultural competence and respecting diversity, working with different committees (e.g. décor). For example:

I am using more culturally diverse images for the website and graphic designs.

Some participants gave very concrete and specific examples of how they were using the understanding and knowledge of Cultural Competency in their work. Some examples:

In most aspects I make the attempt to address culture. Recently I assisted a CS worker in quickly providing services to a woman of Middle Eastern background who was in danger of homelessness. A major concern for her well being had to
do with her lack of community where she could identify and seek support, and how to enable her to make that sort of connection.

Being more aware of holidays that other cultures celebrate. Understanding that if I am working with a Hispanic family, most likely the father will be the contact person and that I should direct communication to him. In the past, I would have thought this would have been disrespectful to the mother but now realize that this is the norm for some families.

In summary this question yielded some more practical information that provided concrete examples of cultural competence. This is helpful to PBH to the extent that staff are demonstrating an ability to apply Cultural Competence concepts, which can be difficult to identify and pursue in practice.

3.2 In what ways has your department or your position recognized the importance of Cultural Competence?

A couple of respondents did not answer this question, a few others failed to link their answers to departmental actions or initiatives, instead reiterating the general importance of cultural competency. For example:

You cannot develop trust with those that you serve unless you are aware of and are considerate of consumer’s backgrounds and values. Without trust, you cannot be a good support coordinator and cannot provide quality service.

A couple of participants reported seeing more open communication among co-workers and between departments as well as reduced tension in relation to personal differences in beliefs. There appears to be more open dialogue, according to these respondents, among staff on diversity issues and with cultural competency principles helping to deal with prejudices and biases.

Some respondents also shared that they have started using translators or interpreters for those consumers having language barriers. These respondents began translating literature and treatment plans into other language (especially Spanish) and in few cases they have also hired interpreters to assist them in working with people who speak other languages or are hearing impaired. The issue of Cultural Competence is also discussed in staff meetings of few of the departments.

During the past year, we have enhanced availability of multilingual brochures/resources, assisted in identifying and obtaining needed signage for lobbies (in Spanish), Conference, worked on obtaining resource info for front desk staff on how to access language line if needed (e.g. if someone drops in who does not speak English), etc.

Participants also encourage (and are being encouraged) to attend the Cultural Competency Conference and a respondent from the STR department said that it had been made mandatory. Two respondents, one from Network management and the other from QM, report that their departments have not done anything specific or focused on
this topic. A respondent from the department of community relations shared that their department is creating a company wide internal committee for cultural competence.

4. Recommendations to improve décor modification

PBH has attempted to modify the décor of their offices to be more culturally diverse and inclusive, through art and other decoration. Question 10 invited suggestions from survey participants to respond to and/or further improve the décor modifications that are already underway.

4.1 What suggestions do you have for this initiative (décor modification?)

Some respondents seemed quite satisfied with the activities already being undertaken.

Continue on the path of including art of all races, ethnicities, and cultures.

Honestly, I rarely look at it. But, I realize that others probably do and that it is important to reflect diversity.

The décor modification is great!! It is just one of many ways to become more CC. This is visual. We have created a Decor Plan that will give more direction to those whom serve on the committee. We are moving in the right direction.

There were few respondents who suggested having plaque cards to give little information about history of each picture or cultural artifact as in the current display form one gets no information of their background.

However, some individuals who, while appreciated the current changes made in the décor, also mentioned the need for including pictures and expressions from other cultures which have not represented so far. They see it offending for those who perceive that their cultures are left out. They find the focus so far has been on Hispanic, African and American cultures and other cultures do not have adequate representation. More importantly they find the representation of homeland’s (US) culture missing.

Whose cultures are being reflected by the decorations? Consumers or staff? I feel like we forgot about our homeland.

I think we should definitely find some American art as well as the other cultures; we really cannot be so focused on displaying other cultures that we forget where we are.

A few pointed out the solutions to include other cultures’ expressions and suggested to ask the staff or get their feedback about what they would like to see exhibited as a reflection of their cultures.

Seems like we got a bit off track on office decor’ - I have asked Michelle White to assist me in obtaining stock photos (such as those used on website) that we can
have enlarged to poster size at Kinkos and have framed for PDS locations. I feel responsible for PDS locations and do not want to offend anyone or do anything less than communicate that everyone is welcome here...regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, who is or is not in your family, whether you are fat/skinny/wear glasses/use a wheelchair/are athletic, whether you are a child/teen/adult/older person, etc. I feel that our decor should send that message and right now it does not.

There were also some specific suggestions for art work and other modifications and improvements at different places of the office.

Maybe background music (representing various cultures) for our reception areas for the Area office. We also need more decor on the second floor of the area office.

Each office should have their own committee to discuss and decorate their own locations, instead of one small committee trying to cover all locations.

Just try to make a cohesive scheme...the room upstairs at Copperfield is distracting to me because there's nothing that pulls it together...same frames, same color matting, etc. It looks like a kid's room to me with posters that are poorly presented. Many of the other places are looking better but still on one hall, you have a newly decorated space 5 - 10 feet away you've got gold frames with floral, etc & the walls need to be totally neutral to make the art fit.

There were a few respondents who had more critical perspectives on the décor change, as represented by these quotes:

I recognize the attempt at cultural diversity but when a southwestern picture is placed under a running burgundy border or in a pastel colored room, it brings to mind that it is our effort to make sure that we are culturally responsible but this effort is forced.

Do it in a tasteful and not overbearing manner. You don't want it too over the top and have it say "Look! We care about different cultures!" Then it just seems like a put-on and not genuine. Make it tasteful and real.

What is the cultural relevance of each piece of art? Can we learn about its background, the origin, the symbolism, and the meaning of each piece? Seeing with the eye alone, does not equate to nor enhance one's cultural knowledge.

5. Conclusions and Implications

As mentioned at the outset of this report, the content areas covered by the survey overlapped considerably, leading the respondents to provide similar kind of responses throughout. This places limitations on the level of interpretation and recommendations that could be made. This final section provides a brief recap of the findings and some tentative recommendations.
In general...

The Cultural Competence Initiative is really a commendable effort of PBH in its attempt to effectively serve the diversity of consumers. Most of the survey respondents demonstrated awareness of the key features of Cultural Competence and reported that awareness and understanding of Cultural Competency is beneficial to their organization and their ability to meet the needs of their clients.

Departmental variation...

However, the data also shows that there is variation in understanding and applying this new knowledge across different departments. Some departments, like QM and Network Management, do not seem to have it as a central focus, while others, like community relations and STR, appear to be taking the lead.

New staff...

It can be inferred from the responses of the new staff that Cultural Competence is not part of staff orientation as two respondents who recently joined the organization were not aware of this initiative. The effort of the Department of Community Relations to create a company wide internal committee for cultural competence would appear to be a good tool to ensure a uniformity of understanding and application.

Office décor...

With the exception of few, most of the respondents were positive about the décor modifications with some participants providing suggestions on how to improve them. There were a few common criticisms, such as the need to focus on diversity as opposed to selected cultures (e.g., more art portraying multiculturalism as opposed to individual art pieces portraying individual cultures) and concerns about “American” culture being lost in these new representations. A couple people also spoke on a seemingly esthetic level, raising concerns about tastefulness and genuineness (the feeling seems to be that a room of diverse art and décor, if not planful, may also not look very nice).

Unanswered questions...

While there may be other evaluation data available to PBH, we would like note that there was little opportunity in this survey for staff to connect the actual interventions within PBH’s Cultural Competency Initiative to their own practices within the organization. Staff were able to provide fairly accurate definitions of cultural competence and some also identified some concrete ways in which they put this knowledge into practice. However, the data lacked functional connections between this knowledge and their day to day work. To some extent, one could argue that this could be inferred; however future evaluation should perhaps examine this link more directly, to fully understand the impact of the initiative.