

Education for care

Understanding other cultures: the need for training

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UNDERSTANDING OTHER CULTURES: THE NEED FOR TRAINING

People from ethnic minorities form a substantial group treated in the renal unit, some 10% or more. Because of the language, dietary and cultural backgrounds, there are special problems for the multidisciplinary team in communication understanding and sensitivity to the particular needs that may arise.

Three case studies illustrate the sort of difficulties that have occurred recently:

- a) A 30 year old Hindu girl, recently diagnosed with end stage renal failure (ESRF) refused dialysis because she believed it was her Karma to die. It was thought she must have psychiatric problems.
- b) A 32 year old unmarried Bangladeshi man with ESRF was mortified by the social stigma from his own community and the likelihood of his family not managing to arrange a suitable marriage because of his chronic illness.
- c) A 60 year old Muslim man on dialysis, dying from cancer and cared for by a daughter. His wish to protect her financial future from male relatives by making a will, caused considerable complications.

These cases and their implications will be discussed.

In all these situations, staff felt helpless and de-skilled, having no knowledge of the cultural implications.

Questionnaires show that the majority of staff from all disciplines receive very little, if any, training in the faiths and cultural traditions of those from other countries - a situation that needs urgent attention.