



Short communication

# Addressing quality medication use among migrant patients: Establishment of an organization to provide culturally competent medication care

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## ABSTRACT

As the global landscape continues to witness an increase in migration, the healthcare community faces an evolving challenge: the provision of quality medication care to migrant patients. Language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of understanding of the local healthcare system can often impede the effective management of medications and access to healthcare services among migrant populations. Pharmacists, as medication experts, are dignified to make a substantial impact in bridging the gap between migrants and quality healthcare. Their expertise in medication management, accessibility, and counseling positions them as critical healthcare providers for this patient population. Pharmacies and pharmacists can serve as trusted hubs where migrants receive not only essential medications but also culturally sensitive support in navigating the healthcare system. This commentary article highlights the critical importance of culturally competent medication care for migrant patients and the central role that pharmacists can play in this endeavor. By establishing organization dedicated to this cause lead by pharmacists, we can not only address an urgent healthcare concern but also set a precedent for a healthcare system that values inclusivity, cultural competence, and equitable access to quality medication care for all, regardless of their cultural background.

## 1. Introduction

Migrating to a new country is a life-altering journey filled with hope, dreams, and opportunities (Hagelskamp et al., 2010), yet it can also be filled with challenges, particularly when it comes to accessing and managing healthcare (Norredam, 2011). Language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of understanding of the local healthcare system can often make the transition even more daunting (Lee and Services, 2003; Kalich et al., 2016; Suphanchaimat et al., 2015). For migrant populations, the ability to access quality healthcare, including essential medications, can be a complex and bewildering process (Arif et al., 2023).

As global demographics continue to shift and become increasingly diverse (Global Migration Indicators, 2021; For a world on the move, n. d.), it is imperative that we address the unique healthcare needs of migrant patients. A significant obstacle faced by these individuals is the

language barrier (Lee and Services, 2003), which can be especially problematic when it comes to medication use. Miscommunication or misunderstanding related to prescriptions and drug regimens can result in adverse health outcomes, non-adherence, and an overall compromised quality of life (Meuter et al., 2015). Furthermore, the cultural disparities in healthcare beliefs and practices can further exacerbate the challenges faced by migrants (McQuaid and Landier, 2018; Li, 2017).

A study by Khan A et al., finds that hospitalized children whose families with limited English proficiency are twice as likely to experience medical errors (Khan et al., 2020). The study included Chinese, Arabic, English, and Spanish-speaking parents of 1,666 hospitalized children aged 17 and younger at seven North American hospitals. Adverse events were reported in 26 of those 147 families, or 17.7%. A study in 2008 by Bartlett G et al. concluded that language barrier with patients lead to increased preventable adverse effects which were mostly drug related (Bartlett et al., 2008). It has been estimated that 27% of

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medication errors is the result of miscommunication. A review published in *BMC Health Services Research* revealed that patients' with limited proficiency in official language adherence with their clinic appointments is often unsatisfactory, with attendance rates as low as 42 %; non-adherence rates can reach as high as 80 % (Sluijs et al., 2007). Health disparities such as unequal treatment are also linked to language barriers among migrants with unequal access to healthcare and unequal health outcomes (Messias et al., 2009). For instance, a study demonstrated that patients who do not speak the local language are disadvantaged in terms of access to healthcare services (Floyd and Sakellariou, 2017). Similarly, several studies have shown that patients who face language barriers have poorer health outcomes compared with patients who speak the local language (Divi et al., 2007; Squires, 2017).

Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in overcoming these obstacles and ensuring that migrant patients receive the culturally competent medication care they deserve. Their expertise in medication management and accessibility, coupled with their potential to serve as trusted healthcare advisors, places them at the forefront of this issue (Saseen et al., 2017). By establishing an organization dedicated to providing culturally competent medication care to migrant patients, pharmacists can create a tangible impact on the well-being and healthcare outcomes of this underserved population. The objective of this commentary article is to shed light on the critical challenges faced by migrant patients, particularly those arising from language barriers and cultural disparities, in their quest for quality medication use. We aim to:

- Discuss why culturally competent medication care is important
- Review the terminologies related to cultural competency
- Review the statistics of migrants globally and the impact of language barrier
- Advocate for the establishment of an organization dedicated to providing culturally competent medication care, thereby serving as a model for healthcare institutions to follow in meeting the needs of migrant patients.
- Discuss the role and components of tanning plan for pharmacists to provide culturally competent medication care

## 2. Why culturally competent medication care is important

Cultural competence in medication care is of paramount importance due to its potential to impact health outcomes, improve medication adherence, and reduce healthcare disparities (McCalman et al., 2017; Truong et al., 2014). It recognizes that healthcare is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, and that the cultural backgrounds and beliefs of patients must be taken into account to provide truly effective care (Betancourt et al., 2016). Language barriers (Meuter et al., 2015), in particular, can create a significant divide, hindering the ability of patients to understand and adhere to their prescribed medication regimens. The result can be adverse health outcomes, non-adherence, and a compromised quality of life. Thus, culturally competent medication care is important in the field of healthcare, as it addresses the diverse and unique needs of patients from various cultural backgrounds. It is crucial for several reasons:

- **Enhancing patient-provider communication:** Effective communication between healthcare providers and patients is fundamental for safe and efficient healthcare delivery (Ross, 2018; Vermeir et al., 2015). When patients and healthcare professionals come from different cultural backgrounds, communication can be hindered by language barriers and differing cultural norms. Culturally competent medication care facilitates communication by taking these differences into account, ensuring that patients can understand their treatment plans, potential side effects, and instructions for medication use. This fosters a more informed and engaged patient-provider relationship.

- **Improving medication adherence:** Medication adherence (Hawley and Morris, 2017), or the extent to which patients take their medications as prescribed, is a significant factor in health outcomes. Patients from diverse cultural backgrounds may have distinct beliefs about illness and treatment, which can impact their willingness to adhere to a prescribed medication regimen (Shahin et al., 2019). Culturally competent care helps healthcare providers understand and address these beliefs, tailoring treatment plans to respect a patient's cultural values and preferences. This, in turn, can significantly enhance medication adherence.
- **Reducing health disparities:** Health disparities, which are systematic differences in health outcomes between different groups, are a significant concern in healthcare (Li, 2017). Cultural competence is a means of addressing these disparities by recognizing that different cultural groups may have different health needs and outcomes. By providing culturally competent medication care, healthcare providers can ensure that all patients, regardless of their cultural background, have equal access to quality care and are not disproportionately affected by health disparities.
- **Minimizing medication error:** Medication errors can lead to serious health complications and even fatalities. Language barriers (Lee and Services, 2003), miscommunication (Ross, 2018), and cultural misunderstandings (Suphanchaimat et al., 2015) can contribute to these errors. Culturally competent care addresses these risks by ensuring that medication instructions and information are presented in a way that patients can understand. This includes using language services, visual aids, or other communication tools tailored to the patient's cultural background.
- **Building trust and confidence:** Culturally competent care demonstrates respect for a patient's cultural identity and values. When patients feel that their culture is acknowledged and respected by their healthcare provider, it builds trust and confidence in the healthcare system. Trust is a critical factor in patient engagement and satisfaction, and it can lead to better health outcomes and more effective medication management.
- **Promote inclusivity and equity:** Healthcare should be accessible and equitable for all individuals (McQuaid and Landier, 2018), regardless of their cultural background. Culturally competent medication care is an essential aspect of promoting inclusivity and equity in healthcare. It sends a clear message that all patients are valued and that their unique needs will be addressed appropriately.

In summary, culturally competent medication care is vital for improving patient outcomes, reducing disparities, and ensuring that healthcare is accessible and equitable for all. It acknowledges and respects the unique backgrounds and needs of each patient, making healthcare more effective, safe, and inclusive.

## 3. Terminologies

Cultural competence (Journals, 2001) is a critical concept in healthcare and other fields. Terms such as culture, cultural competence, cultural sensitivity, cultural diversity, race and ethnicity are complex concepts with no single definition in the literature. Some key terminologies and concepts commonly used in cultural competence are as follows:

**Culture (Sardar, 2015)** — The way of life of a people, including their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts, sciences, modes of perception, and habits of thought and activity.

**Cultural competence (Journals, 2001)** — Cultural competence refers to the ability of individuals or organizations to effectively work with and provide services to people from different cultural backgrounds. It involves understanding and respecting the cultural differences, beliefs, values, and practices of others.

**Cultural sensitivity (Cultural Sensitivity, n.d.)** — Cultural sensitivity is the awareness and consideration of cultural differences when

interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds. It involves recognizing that cultural factors can influence communication, behaviors, and health outcomes.

**Cultural diversity**(Cultural Sensitivity, n.d.) — Cultural diversity refers to the presence of various cultural groups within a particular community, organization, or society. It encompasses differences in ethnicity, race, religion, language, and customs.

**Race**(Wahab et al., n.d.) —Physical traits that are inherited, such as skin color, hair texture, facial features, nationality and ethnic or ancestral national origins are indications of a person’s race.

**Ethnicity**(Wahab et al., n.d.; Ethnicity, n.d.) — A large group of people with a shared culture, language, history, set of traditions, etc., or the fact of belonging to one of these groups.

**Health disparities**(Carter-Pokras and Baquet, 2016) — Health disparities refer to systematic differences in health outcomes between different racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. Cultural competence aims to address and reduce these disparities.

#### 4. Statistics of migrants globally and impact of language barrier

As of September 2021, global migration had been a dynamic and complex phenomenon with significant implications for economies, societies, and policy-makers worldwide(Global Migration Indicators, 2021). At that time, it was estimated that there were over 280 million international migrants, a number that had steadily increased over the years. This trend was driven by various factors, including economic opportunities, political instability, conflict, and family reunification (Global Migration Indicators, 2021). Table 1 provides the statistics about number of migrants residing in United States, Canada, China, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Middle East, and Africa. Table 2 provides the list of issues and various healthcare-related challenges migrants can face abroad due to language barriers. These challenges can significantly impact their access to and quality of healthcare.

For individuals lacking proficiency in an official language, the intricacies of ascertaining available services and scheduling appointments pose notable challenges. Frequently, resources such as telephone, printed materials, or online information from internet resources are only available and accessible in official language, exacerbating difficulties in accessing pertinent health-related information. Language barriers prevent access to ambient health information. For example, lack of English proficiency is strongly associated with lack of heart attack and stroke knowledge(Chow et al., 2008; DuBard et al., 2006), and knowledge of cancer signs and symptoms(Fitch et al., 1997). This linguistic barrier thus contributes to a significant gap in health literacy, potentially impacting individuals’ ability to seek timely and appropriate medical assistance.

Patients with language barriers may be less likely to have a regular medical provider(DeCamp et al., 2011). Notably, within Canada, French-speaking language minorities encounter challenges in securing family doctors, as indicated by research findings(Ngwakongnwi et al., 2012). A study conducted in Canada identified a correlation between language barriers and increased outpatient visits among immigrants

**Table 1**  
Statistics of migrants in different countries.

Region	Number of migrants (approximate, 2021)
United States	Over 44.9 million
Canada	Over 8.8 million
Europe	Approximate 85 million
Australia	Over 7.4 million
New Zealand	Over 1.7 million
China	259.6 million
Middle East	Approximate 35 million
Africa	Approximate 41 million

Note: Refugees, asylum seekers and forced international migration data were not included in this article.

**Table 2**  
Issues migrants can face due to language barriers.

Issue	Description
Limited access to healthcare	Difficulty in explaining medical symptoms and history
Medication misunderstanding	Misinterpretation of medication instructions
Inadequate health education	Lack of understanding of preventive health measures
Barriers to seeking help	Reluctance to access healthcare due to language
Education barriers	Challenges for children in schools due to language
Isolation and cultural stress	Difficulty in connecting with local communities
Community integration	Challenges in participating in cultural activities
Access to social services	Difficulty in accessing government assistance

diagnosed with diabetes(Wang et al., 2012). The impact of language barriers extends to lower engagement in cancer screening initiatives, including breast cancer screening(Alexandraki and Mooradian, 2010); cervical cancer screening(Fang and Baker, 2013); and colorectal cancer screening(Javanparast et al., 2012). One study found similar rates of screening for patients of Chinese background in both the United States and Canada(Tu et al., 2005). These findings underscore the pervasive influence of language barriers on healthcare-seeking behaviors and engagement with preventive health measures.

After accounting for individuals’ health and socioeconomic status, it becomes evident that individuals encountering language barriers are significantly more likely to have fewer health care visits(Shi et al., 2009). The presence of a language barrier correlates with diminished rates of general check-ups, reduced medical issue-related visits(Pearson et al., 2008); and a decreased probability of seeking medical attention, obtaining a flu shot, or undergoing mammography (Pearson et al., 2011). Mothers in Canada with language barrier were significantly less likely to have received pertussis vaccination prior to pregnancy or postnatally(Wong et al., 2015). These observations highlight the intricate relationship between language barriers and healthcare utilization, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address linguistic disparities in healthcare access and preventive measures.

There are additional and specific barriers to access to mental health services(Ohtani et al., 2015). Elderly immigrants facing language barriers exhibit elevated levels of psychological distress compared to cohorts proficient in the official language, and demonstrate a reduced likelihood of engaging with mental health services(Kim et al., 2011). Moreover, language barriers exert a pervasive impact on the utilization of various supplementary or alternative health services. International research highlights diminished utilization of poison control centers (Litovitz et al., 2010), emergency services(Meischke et al., 2013), rehabilitation services, home support services, and infectious disease testing(Guirgis et al., 2012).

#### 5. Establishment of an organization dedicated to providing culturally competent medication care

The complex healthcare needs of migrant populations often go un-addressed due to language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to appropriate healthcare services. By creating an organization that focuses on delivering quality medication use, we can significantly improve the health outcomes of these vulnerable communities. Fig. 1 shows the framework of a culturally competent medication care.

The proposed organization would serve as a vital platform to address the unique medication-related challenges faced by migrant patients. It would aim to provide comprehensive pharmaceutical care, encompassing appropriate medication selection, patient counseling, medication adherence support, and regular follow-up. Furthermore, the organization would actively promote health literacy among migrant communities, fostering a better understanding of medication use and its impact on overall health.

To ensure the effectiveness of the organization, a crucial aspect

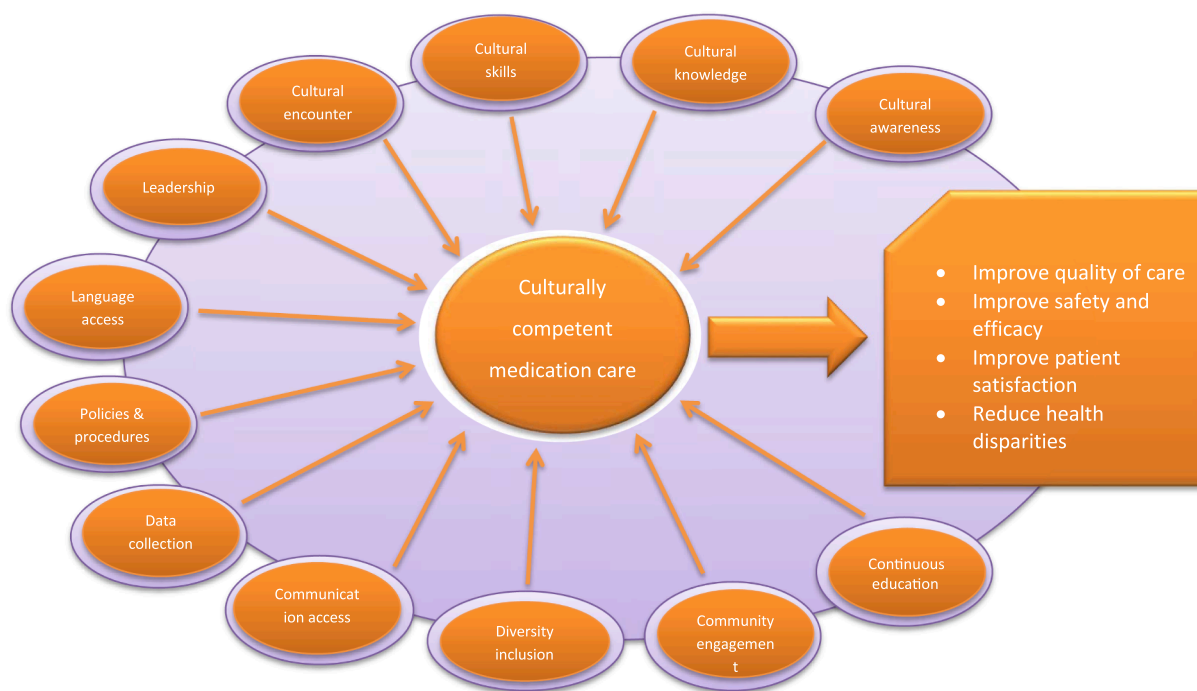


Fig. 1. Framework of a culturally competent medication care.

would be its international organizational side. Collaborations with existing international organizations working in the field of migrant health would be vital in sharing best practices and knowledge exchange. Partnerships with non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and healthcare providers across the globe would foster a collaborative approach, allowing us to tap into a wealth of expertise and resources. By leveraging these international connections, we can establish standardized protocols, training modules, and culturally sensitive care models to be implemented across various regions.

Funding for such an organization could come from multiple sources. Government grants and funding from international aid agencies would play a crucial role in initiating and sustaining the organization's operations. Private foundations and corporate sponsorships with a vested interest in healthcare equity and migrant rights could also be approached for financial support. Additionally, crowdfunding campaigns and community fundraising initiatives could engage the public in contributing towards this noble cause.

Ensuring access to this organization for migrant patients is of paramount importance. Strategies to address accessibility challenges should include establishing clinics in areas with high migrant populations, conducting mobile healthcare initiatives, and utilizing telemedicine services where appropriate. Collaborative efforts with existing healthcare providers, migrant support organizations, and community leaders would help identify the most effective means of reaching and serving migrant patients.

## 6. Role of pharmacist and cultural competence training

Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between migrant patients and quality healthcare, particularly in the context of medication management (Osae et al., 2022). Their expertise in pharmacology, medication interactions, and counseling is invaluable. Pharmacists can serve as trusted healthcare advisors, helping patients understand their medication regimens, potential side effects, and drug interactions (Saseen et al., 2017). Moreover, pharmacists are often among the most accessible healthcare professionals (Hedima et al., 2021). Community pharmacies, for example, are often located in neighborhoods and offer a familiar and comfortable setting for patients

(Berenbrok et al., 2022). This proximity to patients places pharmacists in an ideal position to not only dispense medications but also provide culturally sensitive support and guidance in navigating the healthcare system.

Standardized cultural competence training for pharmacists would be a crucial step towards ensuring that pharmacists can provide culturally competent medication care. This training can equip pharmacists with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to offer effective, respectful, and patient-centered care to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It can enhance the pharmacist's ability to communicate effectively with patients from various cultural backgrounds. It ensures that patients understand their medications, dosages, and potential side effects, which can lead to improved adherence and health outcomes. Furthermore, training will help pharmacists identify and address disparities in healthcare access and outcomes among different cultural groups. By understanding cultural factors that impact health decisions, pharmacists can contribute to reducing disparities. The components of standardize cultural competence training are as follows:

- Training should begin with increasing pharmacists' self-awareness of other cultural background and biases. Understanding different cultural perspective is essential for providing care that respects the values and beliefs of others.
- Pharmacists should acquire knowledge about the cultural norms, health practices, and belief systems of the communities they serve. This knowledge enables them to identify potential cultural barriers to medication adherence and work with patients to overcome them.
- Training should emphasize the importance of tailoring care to individual patient needs, preferences, and values. Pharmacists should encourage patient participation in decisions related to their medications.
- Standardized training should include information about accessing language services, such as interpreters and translated materials, to ensure that language barriers do not hinder effective medication communication.
- Practical exercises using case studies and role-playing can help pharmacists apply their cultural competence knowledge to real-

world scenarios, allowing them to practice cultural sensitivity in a safe learning environment.

- Cultural competence is an evolving field, and pharmacists should be encouraged to engage in continuous education to stay current with the latest developments in healthcare and cultural competence.

## 7. Future direction

Pharmacists, healthcare institutions, policymakers, and advocacy groups must collaborate to address the multifaceted challenges migrant patients face in medication care. Recommendations include the development of standardized cultural competence training for pharmacists, investments in multilingual resources, and the creation of patient education materials that are culturally tailored.

## 8. Conclusion

The establishment of an organization dedicated to providing culturally competent medication care to migrant patients would significantly address the gaps in healthcare experienced by these vulnerable populations. By focusing on quality medication use and leveraging international collaborations, pharmacists can ensure the provision of comprehensive care that respects the cultural nuances and unique healthcare needs of migrant communities. With the support of government, international organizations, and the wider community, pharmacists can create a sustainable and impactful initiative that improves the health outcomes and overall well-being of migrant patients.

## Author contributions

MAR has generated the idea and responsible for conceptualization. MAR and SA were engaged in reviewing the literature, drafting, and writing. DF provides supervision and critical revision. All authors listed have made a substantial and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## Declaration

During the preparation of this work Dr. Danyal Iftikhar used Jenni AI tool to improve language and readability. After using this tool, the Dr.

Ahmer Raza reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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