

Negotiating cross-cultural issues at the end of life: you got to go where he lives.

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# Negotiating Cross-Cultural Issues at the End of Life "You Got to Go Where He Lives"

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## Abstract

Culture fundamentally shapes how individuals make meaning out of illness, suffering, and dying. With increasing diversity in the United States, encounters between patients and physicians of different backgrounds are becoming more common. Thus the risk for cross-cultural misunderstandings surrounding care at the end of life is also increasing. Studies have shown cultural differences in attitudes toward truth telling, life-prolonging technology, and decision-making styles at the end of life. Using 2 case studies of patients, one of an African American couple in the southern United States and the other of a Chinese-American family in Hawaii, we outline some of the major issues involved in cross-

cultural care and indicate how the patient, family, and clinician can navigate among differing cultural beliefs, values, and practices. Skilled use of cross-cultural understanding and communication techniques increases the likelihood that both the process and outcomes of care are satisfactory for all involved.

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