

Shadowing a Psychiatrist at Guangzhou Hospital: Observing Cultural Differences in China's Mental Healthcare

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Project

Country: China

Agency: Guangzhou Overseas Chinese Hospital

Objectives: To intern at the psychiatric unit of a Chinese hospital and:

- Shadow mental health and psychiatric practitioners in a different country
- Conduct qualitative interviews with staff about cultural attitudes
- Observe the influence of stigma and other prospective barriers to mental healthcare among Chinese natives, to inform clinical practice with Chinese Americans and healthcare systems in the United States

Background

Purpose: Asian Americans find mental illnesses significantly stigmatizing, often resulting in delaying or denying care^{1,2}

- Literature suggest that Asian Americans seek mental health services less than other ethnic groups³⁻⁵
- Family⁶ and community⁷ are important values among Chinese individuals
- In general, stigma is a prominent barrier to receiving mental healthcare^{8,9}

Choice: Selection of Guangzhou internship due to personal research and clinical interests working with Chinese Americans in social work career

Skills and Outcomes

Hospital Internship:

- Adaptation of professional identity
- Communication with staff and patients in Mandarin Chinese
- Assessment skills while observing psych. evals, outpatient consultation sessions and inpatient check-ins

Academic Research:

- Conducting a literature review and writing a theory paper for publication
- Synthesis and critical analysis of observational findings using a culturally sensitive framework



Connections

Classroom Connections:

- Psychiatric hospitals in China are greatly influenced by Western practice (i.e. use of U.S. tools such as the PHQ-9 & GAD-7)
- Many areas in China do not have social workers, and there is opportunity for movement towards integrated health systems

Career Connections:

- Collectivist values are important to be sensitive to when working with Chinese Americans in practice
- Agencies should work to address disparities in access for clients of different ethnic backgrounds



Lessons Learned

Takeaways: Seeking to understand our clients' cultural foundations help us learn about their lived values

- Family members in China are deeply involved in a patient's mental healthcare, often at great toll and sacrifices
- Stigma is a prominent barrier to seeking care among Chinese families, and this is prevalent in the United States

Future Directions: Social workers must continue incorporating cultural sensitivity into all forms of practice

- Clinical: help Chinese Americans navigate dual values, provide support and resources for family members
- Research: investigate concepts of family burden, stigma, barriers to mental healthcare among Chinese groups

Advice for Students

- **Keep a personal journal or blog when traveling:** Having a space to reflect and process is immensely helpful
- **Practice humility:** The opportunity to shadow at another country's established institution is a huge privilege, and it is important to recognize what we are bringing into someone else's space as a guest
- **Be curious:** Take initiative and seek out as many opportunities as possible to shape your own learning experience

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