

Cultural Complexity

I had cultural complexity experience when I had to work as a hospital pharmacist in two different cities in Thailand while I was studying Pharmacy in my senior years. The first hospital which I worked is also the medical school located in the northern part of Thailand. This hospital is a well-known hospital which has many experienced physicians, medical specialists and advanced medical equipment. Furthermore, this hospital is always crowded with patients and barely has enough rooms for patients transferred from small hospitals in the rural areas. The second hospital which I had a chance to work was a very small hospital which had only 30 hospital beds in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. Additionally, this small hospital did not have any specialty clinics and had only a surgeon and a medical specialist for children at that time. If the patients were in a critical status and needed further treatment, these patients would be transferred to the bigger hospital in the big cities.

In the first hospital, the work culture is a divided and rigid hierarchy, and there were a lot of strict rules to follow. I had to participate in ward rounds every Wednesday and Friday morning. My responsibilities were to monitor whether the physicians used medications appropriately and help physicians in prescribing drugs to patients when the doctors needed any suggestions or information. I had difficulty to work as a clinical pharmacist with many doctors especially the ones aged more than 50. These physicians hardly took my suggestions because they mentioned that I had a little experience in this field. If I noticed that the doctors might be unaware when they prescribed drugs which had the same therapeutic goals and were in the same class to the patients, I could not inform the doctors directly. I had to report this incidence to my supervisor, and then she would fill out the form to inform the doctor. Almost all of my colleagues in the Pharmacy department were older than me, so I normally had to do what they assigned me to do. During the department meeting, I barely had a chance to give my comments and present my ideas to improve work efficiency and reduce the medical errors. While I was working in this hospital, I had never hanged out with my co-workers after work or on weekends. My co-workers always talked about their kids during the lunchtimes, so I had nothing to talk about it. Moreover, only a few pharmacists in my department were interested to join the activities which the head of the hospital always set throughout the year to strengthen the relationship among medical staff. Most of my co-workers along with my supervisors thought that attending the activities wasted their time to finish their work, and some had to open their drugstores in the evening.

The work culture in the hospital in Kanchanaburi is also hierarchical but flexible and friendly. I had similar responsibilities in this small hospital. During the ward rounds, the physicians and I sometimes shared information about medications. However, when I noticed that some physicians might prescribe drugs inappropriately, I had to report any medical errors to my supervisors to review and check before I informed the doctors. While working in this small hospital, my co-workers (pharmacists, doctors, nurses and dentists) and I spent time on the

lunchtime by sharing some funny stories. After work, my co-workers and I went to gym together and had dinner together. On the weekend, sometimes we went to camping or going to shopping in the downtown. We helped each other solve problems in the workplace. Almost all medical staff always participated in the activities to strengthen our relationship.

This experience was memorable for me because it was the main cause which I decided to change from a hospital pharmacist to another field because only a few times that the physicians accepted my suggestions. Moreover, I could not explain the details and inform the incidence to the doctors directly. I did not think this was the good way in communication. Before working in the small hospital, I thought that the work culture should be very similar because I had similar responsibilities and still worked in the similar environment but only in the smaller scale. I realize now that I had faced the cultural complexity.

I think the culture in these two hospitals has a hierarchical dominant and seniority system. However, there are differences about the work culture between these two hospitals including the boundaries among co-workers, ego and flexibility.

In my opinion, I would say that I live in several cultures simultaneously. Some cultures are the same as my culture, but some are different from my culture. For instance, I teach English grammar to employees in a company. I have to follow the rules set by the company and keep the appropriate distance with my students. I have to use formal ways and language to communicate with them. However, when I teach English grammar to a private group of students, we talk about several things such as movies and trips, and sometimes we have lunch together. We communicate with each other by using applications offered on the smartphones. We use shorten words and emoticons when we chat via Line, one of the phone applications.