

CULTURALLY COMPETENT AUDIOLOGISTS

FIRST ARTICLE IN A SERIES

Thank you very much to Connie Szymczak, M.A. for introducing me in her "Audiology Corner", published in the November/December, 2005 Communication Matters Newsletter.

My name is Gloria E. Valencia. I was born in Colombia, South America, and have resided in the US since 1995. I graduated as a Speech Language Pathologist and Audiologist from the Catholic University in Manizales, Colombia in 1988. In addition, I earned my Master Degree in Audiology at the University of Cincinnati, in 2000.

Although Cincinnati was never on my "life planning" it came to me thanks to my husband Louis. Louis is the first generation Colombian member of his family born in the US. Currently I have two children, a six year old girl and a two year old boy.

I believe that it is important for me to share these personal details with the readers just because they are part of some of my personal and typical anecdotes. Trust me; they have served as great true examples of how it is living in the middle of two cultures. Yes, my very own "cultural sandwich".

Audiology has been my passion since I graduated from college, which is why I went through a long process to obtain my Audiology credentials after moving to the US.

Since my arrival I have never had a single day without struggling with the language, the people or the culture itself. I have accepted, changed or modified some of my customs in order to reach a minimal acculturation and to be able to deal with my daily life and with working as an Audiologist.

This is the first to a series of short and simple articles I will be writing. It is my personal intention to share with all of the professional members of OSHLA who want to incorporate some cultural competencies in their professional practices. I said "simple" just for the writing because my primary language is Spanish and I have not yet mastered my written English skills, however, I want this to be "worth reading article along the lines" so I can help with developing some needed sensitivity towards culturally demanding practices.

Our goal is to use this media to educate and inform all members about the Hispanic Community (however it applies to most cultures embedded in our immediate geographic region). Being "culturally competent" requires some specific knowledge about the cultures in general, in my case, the Hispanic/Latino Community.

Several aspects need to be considered but are not limited to: family roles, history, values, beliefs, worldview, medical aspects (disease, health conditions, high risk behaviors), health care practices, barriers to health care (language, lack of medical insurance), access to translators and interpreters, bilingualism and English as a Second Language. I consider these aspects to be "required" and they constitute a "must know" in order to deliver effective services when you encounter a client whose primary language other than English, in my case, Spanish.

Since it is impossible to describe every aspect of the culture in these articles, I will provide you with the sources to read more about it. I have found excellent books, brochures and websites that are available not only from ASHA but from other great professional sources. You may also contact some of the experts mentioned in these articles, or attend local and national seminars.

With knowledge of the Hispanic/Latino culture, you not only will "honor the integrity of your client" but you will be more culturally responsive to make appropriate diagnostics and to develop treatment plans that better fit and represent the needs of the Hispanic Community.

The articles will vary in length and content according to the space available. I will finish the series with topics more relative to our profession: Speech-Language & Hearing Disorders in the Hispanic/Latino population, ("focusing more in Audiology"); I will attempt to address the question of "why do we need to be Culturally Competent in our Audiology Practice"; and the "How to deliver Linguistically and Culturally Competent services during interviews and assessments". In addition, I hope that I can discuss the

importance of the use of Speech Audiometry and speech materials for Non-English Speaking clients and their families. Finally, I will review specific Spanish sources available for educational and counseling purposes, Hispanic Health fairs, books, brochures, medical forms, articles, videos, agencies, among others.