

Workshop on Teaching Cultural Competence in Istanbul

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Wherever we live in the world, we live in a multicultural society. This is increasingly the case as the world population increases and the means of travel and the need to find a safe haven to live and work becomes more important. Caring in such a society necessitates the recognition of cultural difference which becomes increasingly important when people and their families are faced with threats to their health. This is the background to the Workshop referred to above which was conducted in Istanbul at the beginning of October 2013.

This workshop was the culmination of many years of work by a small group of Health professional educators all of whom are members of COEHRE (Consortium of Health Care Institutions in Health and Rehabilitation Education in Europe). Members of the group, who were from Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the UK, were first concerned to consider how the curriculum should be developed to ensure that health professionals met the cultural needs of their clients. However both the literature and the group members own experience indicated that unless the teachers themselves were culturally competent the message would not be adequately conveyed to the students.

COEHRE funded a project proposal by the group to first consider putting culture in the curriculum. This resulted in the creation of a Framework which was made available on CDrom and which teachers could use to inform curriculum development. The organisation then requested that the group should run a one day pre-conference workshop for teachers to ensure the effective delivery of such a curriculum. This was very successful but it was suggested that more time was needed for discussion and debate. As a result a 3 day workshop was planned for the autumn of 2011 and run in Bruges, Belgium. This was entitled *Developing and Teaching Intercultural Competence (DATIC)*. Again success led COEHRE to plan to provide this facility for those who lived in Eastern Europe and thus through a local contact in Istanbul a University here was chosen as the venue making use of the very multicultural nature of the city itself.

There were 20 participants who came from 9 different countries including one person from Australia. But it did include 2 countries which were once part of the Soviet Union i.e. Serbia and the Czech Republic. The language of the Workshop was English which was not a problem for most participants nor for the Facilitators who were from Sweden, Finland and the UK.

The workshop was held in the Sabahattin Zaim University on the outskirts of Istanbul while accommodation was in the heart of the old city where more multicultural experiences including those from the tourist population were possible. The hospitality of the University was exceptional and reflected the cultural nature of Turkish people to give of their best to visitors This applied both to the classroom facilities and to the food provided.

The workshop ran over 3 days each of which carried a theme. It began with a consideration of Cultural Awareness and made use of experiential learning and critical cultural encounters to immediately engage the participants. The second day was managed by the local University and focused on knowledge of local cultural differences. An *Introduction to Muslim Culture* was given by a Professor from the Faculty of Islamic Sciences while the health care status of the national population was explained by the Head of the University's Nursing Department. It had been anticipated that a

visit to local health care facilities could be arranged but in the event that was not possible However the group were taken to a local Mosque and again the cultural aspects of this religion were explained. The final day was entitled Cultural skills and incorporated considering Cultural models and theories and their application to practice. On the final day there was also the opportunity for the participants to share in any relevant activities which were already established in their Institutions.

On evaluation the general impressions of the workshop came across very positively in particular everyone said it had been a worthwhile experience. One of the difficulties of working in a language which is not the participants' first language necessitates more time needed for reflection and this came over in the evaluation. Undoubtedly this was also seen as a good way of meeting people and exchanging ideas.