AETC-NMC
AIDS Education and Training Center
National Multicultural Center
HOWARD UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Case Study Adapted from Addressing HIV Care and Asian American Model

A middle-aged Chinese patient refused pain medication following cataract surgery. When asked, he replied his discomfort was bearable and he could survive without any medication. Later the nurse found him restless and uncomfortable. Again the nurse offered pain medication. Again he refused, explaining that her responsibilities at the hospital were far more important than his comfort and he did not want to impose. Only after she firmly insisted that the patients comfort was one of her most important responsibilities did the patient finally agree to take the medication.

Things to Consider

1. Chinese are taught self-restraint. The needs of the group are more important than those of the individual.

2. Another factor that may be involved in Asian's refusal of pain medication is courtesy. They generally consider it impolite to accept something the first time it is offered.

3. The safest approach for the nurse is to anticipate the needs of an Asian patient for pain medication without waiting for requests - Nurses should be aware of Asian rules of etiquette when offering pain medication, food or other services.

4. If the patient continues to refuse medication, their wish should be respected.

5. Discuss other Cultural Competence issues that may impact retention into care and treatment.