

## Culture

Are the thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. Culture defines:

- How health care information is received;
- How rights and protections are exercised;
- What is considered to be a health problem;
- How symptoms and concerns about the problem are expressed;
- Who should provide treatment for the problem; and
- What type of treatment should be given.

In sum, because health care is a cultural construct, arising from beliefs about the nature of disease and the human body, cultural issues are actually central in the delivery of health services treatment and preventive interventions. By understanding, valuing, and incorporating the cultural differences of America's diverse population and examining one's own health-related values and beliefs, health care organizations, practitioners, and others can support a health care system that responds appropriately to, and directly serves the unique needs of populations whose cultures may be different from the prevailing culture (Katz, Michael. Personal communication, November 1998).