Chapter 15
Cross–Cultural Decision–Making in Healthcare:
Theory and Practical Application in Real Clinical Conditions

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ABSTRACT
This chapter describes how people are connected to each other through a common system of encoding and decoding messages. Opening the European gate has made intercultural communication omnipresent, and this includes health care. Internationally-based tasks need new, culture-aware medical practitioners. The challenges, barriers, and solutions in the aforementioned area based on the personal experiences of the authors. The chapter concludes that in spite of personal experience, intercultural tension continues to be a major hinderance to patient healthcare services.

INTRODUCTION
Culture constitutes a complex structure that includes habitual ways of thinking, acting, and interacting. This built-in set of procedures is “the software of the mind” and can be shared, learned, and updated, but is also subject to typically gradual change. Many attempts at defining culture describe it as a non-monolithic, overlapping set of internal “scripts” defining the functioning of social norms and values: “culture involves the ideas, beliefs, values, and assumptions about life that are widely shared among a group of people and guide much of their behavior” (Brislin, 1993). Assuming this perspective allows us to realize that people are equipped with various cultural “tools”, and some of them may overlap or

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even cut across different cultures (national, regional, organizational, professional, etc.). It can be also shaped by many factors: family, religion, political and educational systems, art and other activities. Culture also influences our vision of the world and interactions with other people: cognition (behaviors, information) and recognition and interpretation of emotions (both our own as well as those of others). Within a particular culture, people are connected to each other through a common system of encoding and decoding messages. Messages are sent, received and confirmed through verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Kim, 1988).

The multiculturalism of the European society is deep due to the migration of people and extensive tourism. There is no doubt that opening the European gates made social interaction and mutual understanding between representatives of different cultures much easier. Intercultural communication helps us become more familiar with foreign countries, organizations, and cultures and affords new opportunities for intercultural communication (Hornakova, 2006).

Figure 1. Cultural categories and their relations to health and compensation
Côté, 2013.