

# Optimising clinical practice in cancer genetics with cultural competence: Lessons to be learned from ethnographic research with Chinese-Australians

**Author/s:** Eisenbruch, Maurice Yeo, Soo See Meiser, Bettina Goldstein, David Tucker, Kathy Barlow-Stewart, Kristine | **Year:** 2004 | **Publication type:** Journal article | **Peer reviewed:** | **Topic area/s:** Physical Health

**Reference:** Eisenbruch, M., S. S. Yeo, B. Meiser, D. Goldstein, K. Tucker and K. Barlow-Stewart (2004). "Optimising clinical practice in cancer genetics with cultural competence: Lessons to be learned from ethnographic research with Chinese-Australians." *Social Science & Medicine* 59(2): 235-248.

**Key Words:**

traditional beliefs, Chinese, acculturation, cancer

**Research aim:**

In the light of their kinship patterns Chinese-Australians were chosen for the present study, which aims to determine the explanatory models of inheritance, cancer, and inherited cancer, with a view to identifying the relationship between these culture-specific lay attributions and help-seeking behaviour, and to identify possible barriers to genetic counselling and testing.

**Results/Conclusion:**

The majority of informants, despite high acculturation and belief in biomedical explanations about hereditary cancer, also acknowledged the influence of traditional family Chinese beliefs, where 'inheritance' and 'genetics' were related to retribution for ancestral misdeeds and offending ancestors. Extensive mismatch of attributes and beliefs were identified in those who attended the clinic and senior family members, creating barriers to optimal service utilisation. Three traditional patterns of beliefs were identified: (a) father and mother contributed in equal share to one's genetic makeup, linked to the ying-yang 'theory'; (b) the dominance of life force (yang chi) and the shaping of genes were transmitted through the paternal line; and (c) natural and supernatural forces operated in the cause of hereditary cancer.

**Implications:**

Exploration and acknowledgement of family beliefs, regardless of cultural background and therefore avoiding stereotyping, can enable the clinician to work with the whole family--those who hold Western attributions, those who maintain traditional notions of genetics and inheritance, and those who incorporate both into their belief systems--and provide effective clinical services. Further ethnographic studies are needed, focusing on the Chinese groups who do not attend the clinic and those with lower acculturation and educational levels.

**Cultural Group(s):**

Chinese

**Location of study:**

**Age group:**

28-69

**Number included in study:**

16

**Type of participants:**

Chinese ethnicity

**Research approach:**

Qualitative

**Type of data:**

Primary

**Secondary data sources used:**

**Specific scales or analytical techniques used:**

**Implications/ Recommendations:**

**Notes:**