

Cultural humility in item writing

General

The use of personal characteristics can be an important part of a vignette and include age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, weight among many others. However, they are not always necessary, and their use may reinforce stereotypes.

General principles include:

1. Use personal characteristics only when they are clinically relevant or aid in distractor quality
2. If necessary, consider using lesser-known populations with disorder. E.g., Use patient with southern European heritage rather than Black for a patient with sickle cell disease.
3. Use personal characteristics when an item would be unreasonably difficult without them. Avoid when inclusion makes the item too easy.
4. Goal for exam would be approximately equal representation of men and women and reflect the population in terms of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.
5. Avoid use when inclusion risks negative stereotyping.
6. When using race or ethnicity, place that descriptor in social history. E.g., Patient identifies as _____ or patient with ____ heritage.
7. Use an actual age or BMI rather than terms like elderly, obese, skinny.
8. List chronic diseases in past medical history rather than as a descriptor of the patient. E.g., Past medical history includes Crohn's disease rather than woman with Crohn's disease.

Specific terms

1. Use Black rather than Afro-American or other options.
2. Appropriate choices for people with Hispanic heritage:
 - a. Men: either Hispanic or Latino(s)
 - b. Women: Hispanic or Latina(s)
 - c. Group: Hispanics or Latinos
3. For sexual orientation, describe the preferred sexual relationship. E.g., men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women.
4. Use Asian for people of Asian heritage unless a more specific reference (e.g., Korean) is appropriate.
5. For transgender people, use born male/female, identifies as male/female.