Adaptation of health care for migrants: who is responsible for it? Results from the COMETH - COMpetences in ETHnicity and Health - study

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Background
In a context of increasing diversity, culturally competent strategies have been recommended to improve quality and access to health care for ethnic minorities. However, despite promising results, the implementation and the diffusion of cultural competences remain sparse among health professionals. Most programs of cultural competences assume health professionals have the responsibility to adapt to migrants but this assumption remains hypothetical. In this paper, we surveyed health professionals’ views on who have the responsibility.

Methods
569 health professionals from 24 Belgian inpatient and outpatient health services were selected according to their geographic localisation. All healthcare professionals were requested to fill in a questionnaire tapping responsibility attribution towards adaptation. We performed a factorial analysis to assess how different responsibility stakes cluster and multilevel regression models to investigate individual and service covariates of responsibility attribution.

Results
Different features were associated with different responsibility assignments: the communication was reported as under the responsibility of the health professionals. On the contrary, 55.3% of health professionals expected the patients to adapt to the gender of the health professionals and to the values of the host country. Most respondents were indecisive concerning the adaptation to health beliefs. Three concepts emerged from the factor analysis: communication, negotiation of the values and health beliefs. Regression indicated that being Belgian (beta = 0.46, p = 0.0037), not being a physician (beta = -0.31, p = 0.0146), and working in a psychiatric unit (beta = 0.32, p = 0.0016) is associated with putting the burden of responsibility of adaptation on the migrant patients.

Conclusions
The responsibility towards adaptation of health care to the migrants has to be considered as multidimensional, depending on the adaptation requested by the situation and on the perceptions of the professional roles. Responsibilities to adapt are between the health professionals and the patients.
Key messages

- The responsibility towards adaptation of health care to the migrants depends on the adaptation requested by the situation and on the perceptions of the professional roles.
- Responsibilities to adapt are between the health professionals and the patients.