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### **HOW ART MAY BE A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING OTHER CULTURES AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF ILLNESS**

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Cultural background has a significant influence upon how we perceive illness, our attitudes to illness and our help-seeking behaviour.

But culture is only one of many influences on our health related beliefs and behaviours. Other factors include e.g. individual factors related to age, gender, sociodemographic background, but also environmental factors such as urban or rural setting, pollution, globalization.

If we want to understand and assess the impact of culture in a particular clinical case, the use of art may be a valuable tool to facilitate this understanding and serve as a bridge over cultural incongruities.

The paper will discuss ways in which the application of artistic elements in the therapeutic process may serve as a useful intervention and ultimately as a vehicle to increase the cultural competence of mental health staff. In an increasingly complex, globalised world with patient populations originating from all parts of the world this may prove to be a profitable instrument.