

Episode: *Author Interview: “What Should Students Learn About the Importance of Cultural Brokering in Immigrant Communities?”*

Guest: Jane Lee, PhD, MSW

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:04] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Jane Lee, a faculty member at the University of Washington in the School of Social Work. She's here to discuss her article, coauthored with Drs Gabriel Robles and Latoya Small, “*What Should Students Learn About the Importance of Cultural Brokering in Immigrant Communities?*,” in the November 2023 issue of the Journal, [Health and Loneliness](#). Dr Lee, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

DR JANE LEE: Thanks for having me. It's great to be here.

[00:00:45] HOFF: So, to begin with, what's the main ethics point that you and your coauthors are making in this article?

LEE: The main ethical considerations that we discuss in this article really center around providing patient-centered, culturally sensitive care, promoting equitable access to health care, and respecting the autonomy and dignity of immigrant patients. Really, we underscore the ethical imperative to ensure equitable access to health care services for all individuals, and that means all individuals, regardless of their cultural background, their legal status, or socioeconomic circumstances. And we emphasize that immigrants often face barriers that can limit their access to high quality health care, and that can raise ethical concerns about justice and the principle of providing equal care for all.

And so, we really emphasize the importance of patient-centered care, which is aligned with the ethical principle of maximizing the welfare and positive outcomes for individuals and society as a whole, which really requires that health care providers act in the best interests of patients. So, that means building trusting relationships, understanding patients' perspectives, and tailoring care to their individual needs to contribute to better health outcomes and patient satisfaction.

And one of the key points of our article really highlights the ethical responsibility of health care providers to address loneliness and isolation experienced by immigrant patients. And we know that loneliness can have significant negative impacts on mental and physical health, and in some ways, the ways in which we provide care can contribute to these feelings of loneliness. [00:02:34] So, in our article, we really suggest that as health care professionals, as cultural brokers, we can help empower immigrant patients by providing them with the knowledge and tools to navigate the health care system and to really address these issues of isolation or loneliness that our patients can encounter. And addressing these issues align with the principles of prioritizing the well-being of patients and ensuring that we do no harm.

[00:03:04] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees at the beginnings of their career to take from this article?

LEE: I think really understanding the significance of cultural sensitivity and humility in health care is key. So, that means recognizing that patients' cultural backgrounds, their values, and beliefs influence their health care perspectives. And that means that as students, we need to strive to really learn about diverse cultures and reflect on our own biases in order to provide patient-centered care. And that really requires embracing patient-centered care as a guiding principle and developing strong communication skills to build trusting relationships with patients, to really actively listen to their needs, and involving them in decisions about their health care. And we need to understand that health care is a constantly evolving field, and so we need to stay open to continuous learning. So, learning is always happening, and we need to strive for continuous self-improvement to really enhance our knowledge and skills in cultural sensitivity, communication, and patient-centered care.

[00:04:16] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to this article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

LEE: So, we touch upon this point a bit in the article, but I really think it's essential to consider the concept of power and its role in shaping the health and well-being of diverse populations when we think about health care strategies for immigrant communities. So, an essential aspect that's often overlooked is really understanding the role of power dynamics within the context of health care delivery for immigrant communities. And we know that power in various forms can influence not only how health care is provided, but also how communities access and engage with health care services. So, the health care systems and institutions in which we work hold significant power to influence the health of the populations that we work with, so really acknowledging and addressing power imbalances within these systems is vital.

So, I really think paying attention to power dynamics and thinking about how as health care providers and students that we could better understand the context in which we're operating, and this understanding can help inform our efforts to really advocate for change, to promote inclusivity, and address social determinants of health that can disproportionately affect immigrant communities. So, really, I think it would be adding a focus on power dynamics within health care systems to expand our conversation beyond individual actions to a broader understanding of how systemic factors shape the health care landscape for immigrant communities and for all communities. And this perspective can really reinforce how we advocate for change at both the individual and institutional levels to improve the health and well-being of the communities we serve. [theme music returns]

[00:06:15] HOFF: Dr Lee, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks to you and your coauthors for your contribution to the Journal this month.

LEE: Thank you. It was great to talk with you.

HOFF: To read the full article as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more Ethics Talk from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.