

her parents. They were frightened and spoke little English. I learned that the child had received a measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) immunization the day before. As I proceeded to unwrap her from the blanket she was in, I quickly assessed the ABCs (airway, breathing, and circulation). I noticed that she was warm (probably a febrile seizure) and that a rag soaked in alcohol was tied around each thigh. Focusing on her potential airway compromise and trying to calm the parents, I put an oxygen mask on her, undressed her for a full assessment, and removed the alcohol rags. I spoke to the parents all the while in a calm, soothing voice. Once I had established an intravenous line and given her lorazepam (Ativan), the seizures stopped. So did the communication between her parents and me. I noticed that they would no longer give me eye contact, and the mother would not even speak to me after the seizures stopped. It wasn't until I was returning to the department from admitting her that I realized why they might have stopped communicating with me: I had removed the rags! Had I only thought to replace the rags or asked their permission to remove the rags, things might have been different.

**Laura L. Kuensting, MSN(R), RN**

*Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital  
St. Louis, Missouri*

Concepts that come from medical anthropology can provide a framework for addressing health care issues. These concepts can have a direct impact on patient care. They lead the nurse away from an ethnocentric or medicine-based view of the health care encounter into the health care reality as constructed by the patient and family. This is relevant for addressing many of the problems that plague the American health care system, including patient dissatisfaction with the health care they receive, unequal distribution of high-quality health care, and excessive costs (Kleinman and Benson, 2006).

It is also important for nurses to recognize that disease and illness are distinct entities. Clinicians diagnose and treat diseases, abnormalities in the structure and function of body organs and systems. Illness and disease are not interchangeable; illness may occur even when disease is not present, and the course of a disease may vary substantially from the experience of illness.