Page 21WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CUlTURAlly COMPETENT 21 how they provide services and then proceed to apply a dominant cultural approach to all clients. They routinely ignore the cultural strengths and uniqueness of people of color, encourage assimilation, and tend to blame victims rather than society for their problems. More to the positive end of the continuum, providers move into a phase that Cross . Such agencies are sincere in their efforts to become et al. call more multicultural but have had difficulty in making progress. They realize that they have problems in serving minority ethnic group clients and have discovered this fact through ineffectual efforts at serving a single ethnic population. They tend to lack a realistic picture of what is involved in becoming culturally competent and often succumb to either a false sense of accomplishment or a particularly difficult and discouraging failure. In addition, they tend to fall prey to tokenism and put unrealistic hopes in the hiring of one or two professionals of color, whose cultural competence they tend to overestimate. It is probably fair to say that the majority of human service agencies today are culturally pre-competent, with some still functioning at the level of cultural incapacity. The last two points on the continuum, which are still probably more hypothetical than real in today’s service world, represent increasing levels of cultural competence. Agencies that possess basic cultural competence are well-versed in the five skill areas believed to be essential to competent cross-cultural service delivery (to be described shortly). Such agencies also “work to hire unbiased employees, seek advice and con-sultation from the minority community, and actively decide what they are and are not capable of providing minority clients” (Cross et al., 1989, p. 17). Finally, cultural pro-ficiency, the positive endpoint of the continuum, refers to providers who, in addition to those qualities exhibited in basic cultural competence, advocate more broadly for multiculturalism within the general health care system and are engaged in original research on how to serve culturally diverse clients better and its dissemination. Having defined this continuum, Cross et al. are quick to point out that movement those qualities exhibited in basic cultural competence, advocate more broadly for multiculturalism within the general health care system and are engaged in original research on how to serve culturally diverse clients better and its dissemination. Having defined this continuum, Cross et al. are quick to point out that movement from one stage to the next takes significant effort. It requires a determined reshuffling of agency attitudes, policies, and practices; the implementation of skill development for all staff; and the serious involvement of all agency personnel: board members, policymakers, administrators, practitioners, and consumers alike. you may find it useful to consider where agencies with which you are familiar might be placed on this continuum and why. ◗ Individual Cultural Competence Skill Areas 2-3 Turning their attention to the development of cultural competence in individual practitioners, Barden, Sherrell, and Matthews (20