



# Cultural Awareness Checklist for Physicians

Cultural differences play an integral role in patient care. Effective and clear communication is essential to facilitate cultural awareness and advance the best possible outcomes for patients. Using aspects of checklist can help ensure patients and family members understand treatment options, recommendations, and what is required of them to comply with the treatment plan.

Also, having individuals at the practice who are familiar with and sensitive to cultures/ethnic groups and their customs can be helpful to:

- Educate physicians and staff about the possible associated needs that will play a role in recovery.
- Ensure understanding in essential interactions with patients and families.
- Provide information about community resources that may be useful for a particular culture or ethnic group's needs.

## **1) VERBAL COMMUNICATION: Identify the patient's preferred method of communication. Make necessary arrangements if translators are needed.**

Miscommunication occurs frequently and is intensified by language or dialect barriers. Some do not speak English at home, and some have difficulty speaking English.

- Assure that information is conveyed and received as intended by continually checking how the other person has heard or understood what has been said.
- With translators, always make sure it is a two-way process of sharing information.

## **2) NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: Identify potential nonverbal communication barriers.**

Most of what we understand is conveyed by non-verbal cues— eye contact, physical distance and touching, gestures, and expressions. These cues are used to aid clarification during complicated situations. We should all learn how we convey information non-verbally to avoid expressing personal biases. Do not make any assumptions about non-verbal communication.

## **3) CULTURE: Identify the patient's culture – use normalizing statements to ask about sensitive topics, such as traditions, customs, religious/spiritual beliefs, and cultural norms that may be particularly important to the patient's clinical situation.**

A respectful way to ask about it is to first explain that they are very common. "A lot of my patients have customs or practices that are important for me to know about so I can make sure to give you the best possible care."

**TRADITIONS & CUSTOMS:** For example, a culture's beliefs about modesty and dress may need to be addressed throughout the recovery process. It may be necessary to find alternative ways to respect people's modesty and cultural beliefs. Sample Question to ask: Do you use any traditional or home health remedies to improve your health?

**RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL BELIEFS: Identify religious/spiritual beliefs. Make appropriate support contacts.**

These beliefs play an important and powerful role in recovery, as patients and families often attribute successful recovery and survival to these types of beliefs. Sample Question to Ask: Will religious observances affect your ability to follow treatment?

**DIET: Address culture-specific dietary considerations.** Simple dietary modifications can be made and will respond to patients' needs. Also, this action will convey respect for the culture group, thus raising comfort level and trust.

## **4) COMPREHENSION: Does the patient and/or family comprehend the situation at hand?**

Nodding and indicating some type of affirmative response does not necessarily mean patients understand what was said. Re-explaining is useful and promotes informed decision-making, particularly during stressful times.

- Gently ask the patient to convey the information, in his/her own words, before concluding that he/she understands.
- Give patients enough time to process information received and to gain familiarity with the situation.
- Allow for more time for any questions that will help clarify the circumstances and know what to do.

## **5) TRUST: Does the patient and/or family appear to trust the caregivers? Watch for verbal and non-verbal cues.**

Good communication is essential to establishing trust with patients. If no trust is established, patients are more likely to withhold essential health-related information, less likely to follow instructions, and do not believe recovery can be achieved.

## **6) BIASES: Examine and recognize your own biases and prejudices.**

We all have unconscious biases and prejudices that impact our relationships with patients. Identifying and understanding these biases helps to control them. Work to overcome these fears; education will facilitate the process.