

Quick Tips for Working with People of Different Cultures

1. Most people appreciate a sincere effort to reach out, greet them in their own language, or work with their beliefs. Don't worry about making mistakes.
2. It may take longer to build rapport and trust with clients from different cultures. Be patient.
3. Ask clients ahead of time to let you know if you ever do something that is offensive in their culture.
4. Thoroughly explain the procedures that you propose to conduct (including which body part(s) you will need to touch), and the reason for doing them.
5. Be sure to use a trained interpreter--not merely a family member or friend--to work with patients who have limited English proficiency.
6. Understand that there may be cultural reluctance to discuss certain topics, particularly if the provider or interpreter are not of the same gender as the patient.
7. As much as possible, use words (not gestures) to express your meaning. Gestures that are acceptable in our culture may be offensive or meaningless in other cultures.
8. Find out how the person views his or her illness/condition. This can help both culturally and clinically by eliciting health beliefs and names of diseases with which providers may not be familiar. The following questions may be used as a guide:
 - **What do you call your problem? What name does it have?**
 - **What do you think caused your problem?**
 - **Why do you think it started when it did?**
 - **What does your sickness do to you? How does it work?**
 - **How severe is it? Will it have a short or long course?**
 - **What do you fear most about your condition/disorder?**
 - **What are the chief problems that your sickness has caused for you?**
 - **What have you done so far to treat the sickness?**
 - **What kind of treatment do you think you should receive?**
 - **What are the most important results you hope to receive?**

Sources: Kleinman, Arthur. (1980) *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture*.
Berkeley University Press

Lozorik, Donna. (1984) *Pilot study to Develop a Tool to Elicit Khmer Beliefs about the Cause of Illness*. Unpublished thesis, Boston Univ. School of Medicine.