

# Advice for GPs to create and maintain culturally competent general practices

Cultural competence skills will help you to develop strong relationships with your patients and their families, leading to greater accuracy in diagnosis, improved treatment plans and greater continuity of care when consulting with people of cultural backgrounds that are different to your own. Ultimately, the result is greater doctor and patient satisfaction, with better health outcomes.

Aside from the fact that all GPs wish to provide the best possible care and achieve the best outcomes for their patients, there are several other factors that have led to the growing awareness of the need for culturally competent health care; in particular, the Health Practitioners' Competence Assurance Act's ('HPCAA') legislative requirement for cultural competence. This is supported by clear statistics of health disparities which show that equal outcomes across ethnic groups (as a subset of 'culture') are not being achieved.

This document is designed as a general guide for cultural competence across all cultures, with skills that are intended to be transferable across all groups. Specific text on Māori cultural competencies is necessary because this group has poor health status, and a unique status in New Zealand as the indigenous people and a partner to the Treaty of Waitangi.

Please refer to page 10 of 'Cultural Competence – Advice for GPs to create and maintain culturally competent general practices in New Zealand' for specific suggestions.

- **Focus on equal health outcomes**...to do so, you may need to adapt your practice to the needs of your different patients, rather than expect patients to adapt to your practice.
- **Foster a relationship with the community**...Strengthen your relationship with individual patients and their families by showing an active interest in their communities.
- **Ensure all general practice staff are culturally competent**...Hire staff that reflect your client population and ensure they are all trained in cultural competence.
- **Create a physical environment of cultural competence at the general practice**...that accommodates the cultural values and preferences of your patients.
- **Collect and maintain accurate ethnicity data**...so that you are able to tailor your care to the needs of individuals and their families.
- **Pronounce your patients' names correctly**...If you are unsure, ask your patient. They will appreciate that you acknowledge your difficulty and request assistance.
- **Consider involving the family**...Patients of some ethnic backgrounds, such as Māori and Pacific peoples, may prefer the involvement of their families when dealing with doctors. A patient, visiting you alone, may seem uncooperative or uneasy without such support.

- **Teach and learn...**Do your best to incorporate both in your dealings with your patients. By showing yourself as willing to learn from your patients, they will likely be more receptive to your teachings.
- **The LEARN model for cross-cultural health care...**Listen to your patient; Explain your reasons; Acknowledge their concerns; Recommend a course of action; Negotiate a plan that gives consideration to your patient's cultural norms and personal lifestyle.
- **Be flexible in your approach to sharing information...**by asking your patient and their families about what they already know, want to know, and their preferences in receiving information, and try to accommodate that.
- **Be aware of indirect information and how to interpret it...**During a consultation, be alert to opportunities to address patient concerns that are veiled in a social comment or recollections of their experiences.
- **Your delivery should not be the same for every patient...**Be aware of the speed and tone of your speech, your body language and the language that you use, such as medical jargon.
- **Try to find some common ground with your patient...**because outcomes may improve when patients feel they share genuine similarities with their GP.
- **Remember that we are all individuals within our cultural groupings...**no one term encompasses any of us.
- **Members of society hold you as a representative of the medical culture...**and possibly of whatever other cultures to which you belong, such as white, Indian, Muslim, Presbyterian, female, or disabled.

## Māori cultural competencies

- **Eye contact and 'kanohi ki te kanohi' – face-to-face:** Although many Māori have a preference for face-to-face communications, they 'listen with our ears, not our eyes' and thus may choose to focus on a neutral spot during a conversation, rather than maintaining eye contact.
- **Importance of whānau:** The communal emphasis of traditional Māori culture means that many Māori may wish to have their whānau (family) with them at consultations and involved in treatment planning. Ask your patient for their preferences and be ready to accommodate their wishes where you are able (e.g. meet in the largest consultation room).
- **Silence:** In Māori culture, silence is not considered wasted or uncomfortable time but rather time to gather thoughts and compose oneself before addressing a particular subject.
- **Allow time to speak:** Eloquence rather than brevity is valued in Māori culture, so hastening or interrupting another person's speech can be considered a sign of rudeness and disrespect. Be sure to allow your patient time to speak and try not to interrupt.
- **Personal space:** Patients have different boundaries for personal space; in Māori culture particularly, it is important to respect the physical distance between yourself and your patient until a closer relationship between the two of you has been forged.

## Other cultures

- **Review local demographics:** All metropolitan areas in New Zealand will have sizable numbers of Pacific peoples, Asian peoples and recent immigrants. Knowing who these groups are is the first step on a journey of understanding the preferences of patients from these groups.
- Culture-specific syndromes (such as bulimia in Western Europeans) are uncommon, but culturally determined preferences will likely influence the interactions you have with people from cultures other than your own.