

Good Practice Guidelines General Issues

- Information booklets and even signs should be translated into several languages, especially those that are common in the local ethnic community. A good start would be a leaflet informing patients about what to expect from a consultation or as an inpatient.
- Ensure patients know what is happening at all times, to minimize misunderstandings.
- If in any doubt, it is better to ask than assume. Start by talking to your local hospital chaplain, local groups and patient liaison groups; they may be able to recommend further sources of information.
- As many ethnic groups are very social, expect frequent visits to a patient by family, friends and members of the community.
- Some cultures see visiting the sick – whether friends, family or just a member of the community – as a duty. Some visitors may not be able to visit during set visiting hours and so discuss visiting policy with the patient if possible.
- Consult the hospital policy on family or community members bringing in food for a patient. If there is no conflict with policy – or a medical diet – then this may be the best way to ensure a patient is eating properly and maintaining their links with the community.
- Touching should be kept to a minimum whatever the ethnic group or religion of a patient or staff member – this includes hugging, patting someone on the back and even shaking hands. Do not invade personal space.
- Do not be offended if a member of another ethnic group is not willing to shake hands with you; many cultures do not permit excessive contact.
- Take note that people from some ethnic cultures might not maintain direct eye contact with the speaker when they are being spoken to. This is their usual way of showing respect for the speaker and so offence is not intended.
- Do not interrupt a member of staff or a patient who appears to be praying or meditating. Leave them and come back later. Always warn a patient or colleague of your arrival by knocking on the door or making some other noise to announce your presence.