

PATIENT POPULATION COMPETENCY – UNDERSERVED & VULNERABLE

Treating patients with respect, compassion and honesty is most important thing to do regardless of their culture/ethnicity, background or circumstances.

PATIENT CHALLENGES

- **Pride** - Many patients are dealing with a loss of pride when seeking charity healthcare. While some may project an attitude of entitlement, this may in fact be a survival 'front', a pride reflex developed to combat a sense of helplessness.
- **Stress** – Patients may experience high levels of stress from the day-to-day survival associated with poverty.
- **Emotional states** - Some patients may slip into an emotional or agitated state when faced with what might seem a minor barrier, or when overwhelmed by an abundance of new information.
- **Mental illness** – Some patients are dealing with undiagnosed or poorly managed mental illnesses.
- **Homelessness** – Some patients may not be receiving the rest and nutrition they need to recuperate and it may take longer to bring about the desired healthcare results.

Understanding a person's cultural beliefs will help to improve patient compliance and well-being.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

- When treating patients of a culture that is different than yours, **it is important not to assume anything.**
- Communication with the patient is the best strategy for creating an appropriate treatment.
- **Be mindful of gender** especially for sensitive topics. Ex: In Muslim cultures, try to obtain a female provider and/or interpreter for a female patient. In other instances, male providers may be viewed as being more capable than female providers.
- **Be aware of hierarchical customs.** In some cultures, direction may not be taken from a younger person unless they are an authority figure or directly interpreting for an authority figure. In other cultures, the oldest male relative may need to make medical decisions.
- Family or community members may be crucial to obtaining consent and adherence to treatment.

LANGUAGE & LITERACY BARRIERS

- Patients may speak English well enough for conversation, but need extra time and help understanding medical instructions. Medical terminology may be difficult to translate, **request the InDemand Interpreting service whenever something is in question.**
- **Look and speak directly to the patient**, even when an interpreter is present.
- A patient who utilizes an interpreter may also understand and/or speak some English, but may be more comfortable, with interpretation into their native language.
- **Some patients might have low literacy skills** and may be embarrassed to admit it. **Do not assume patients can read** written instructions, when in doubt provide demonstrations or verbal instructions to them.
- **Look for signs of comprehension difficulties. Slow down; simplify**, speak in normal conversational tones, avoid idioms, limit the information and repeat the instructions.
- **Listen and check for understanding** by asking open-ended questions such as "How are you going to take this medication?"
- Avoid using family members to interpret potentially sensitive medical information.