

## Communication Techniques

You should assess the cultural or social factors of your individual patients instead of relying on generalizations about specific cultural groups. Using transcultural communication techniques can help you with this individual assessment. As you begin your relationship with a patient from another culture, you may want to consider using the following basic transcultural communication techniques (Muñoz & Luckmann, 2005)

Approach a new patient slowly.

When first meeting a new patient, approach slowly and wait for the patient to acknowledge you. Rushing in may exacerbate the fear of the unknown and the unexpected that many patients, especially those from other cultures, may associate with health care personnel.

Greet the patient respectfully.

Refer to the patient by title (Dr., Mr., Mrs.) and last name rather than by first name. Make sure that you are pronouncing the patient's name correctly. Also, help the patient pronounce your name if you notice difficulty in doing so.

Provide the patient with a quiet setting.

Provide the patient with a quiet setting where you will not be disturbed. If the patient is confined to bed, consider drawing the curtains completely around the bed to provide privacy. Patients from some cultures may want their family present.

Sit a comfortable distance away and lean slightly toward the patient.

Do not interrupt the patient. Avoid changing the subject. Nod occasionally. Ask pertinent questions to engage the patient. Use appropriate gestures and facial expressions to indicate that you understand and accept the patient's feelings of anxiety, fear, or anger.

Allow sufficient time for your meeting.

Try not to appear rushed or anxious to leave. Avoid fidgeting or looking at the clock. A hurried attitude on your part could offend patients, especially those from cultures that value politeness or value an unhurried approach to communication.

Explain.

Explain to patients (especially those who are nervous or fearful) that they can and should speak freely to you about their symptoms and fears. Emphasize that the information they tell you will be shared only with other health care professionals for purposes of diagnosis and treatment.

Listen.

Listen to what your patients are trying to tell you about their symptoms. Listen with particular care to the words a patient uses to describe a symptom. Then use those same terms, rather than medical jargon, when discussing symptoms with that patient.

If your patient seems uneasy...

Pull up a chair and position yourself parallel to and lower than the patient. This position helps the patient feel more in control. You may also appear to be more supportive.